

## Tales from...Behind the Veil.

For those of you au fait with **The X-Files**<sup>1</sup> I've always been something of a Fox Mulder. *I Want to Believe* you see, not just in UFOs and Nessie, but in the existence of ghosts. That particular word is rather too loaded in my humble opinion mind you, conjuring up as it does a white sheeted phantom floating about the place in the middle of the night. Its garb comes complete with eye holes so it doesn't stub its ghostly toe on the furniture I suppose. All very silly. My own interest dates back to my childhood of course. I loved **Scooby Doo**<sup>2</sup>, and **The Ghosts of Motley Hall**<sup>3</sup> you see, and anything 'weird' as my mother used to put it, would, and still does, grab my attention. Mention that you might have seen a ghost and I'll be the first one to want to know more. Mention that your house is actually haunted and, trust me, I'll be there like a shot.

Now, I wouldn't claim to have seen a full blown phantom, not as such but, of course, family members have told me tales over the years as we're all a bit 'that way inclined'. My brother Fran, a former police sergeant as you'll remember, claimed to have seen the odd thing or two though not, I'm sorry to say, in Nassington but rather in his house in Ketton. My other brother Toni never tired of telling me about the '*Blue Boy*' whenever we drove by the wooden gate on the Apethorpe to Nassington road. This former airman as he told it was waiting patiently for his illusive true love to meet him there. Apethorpe, again, is just a little too 'out of town' for this discussion. When it comes to my mother though, well, that's another matter altogether.

Despite claiming to not believe in 'such things' mum did, actually, tell me when pressed to do so, and none too hard at that, of an event from her own childhood. Now, many of you may know that the green area between the church and Elsie's Vintage Tea Room had once been the site of Barrack Yard<sup>4</sup> which, as the name suggests, was a group of houses positioned around a courtyard with a well in the centre. My grandparents John and Elsie Black lived there with my mum Jean, her sister Eileen and her brother Harold. Mum and Auntie Eileen shared a bed and one evening when they'd stopped kicking one another, mum saw, coming through the open door, the hazy image of a lady dressed in Victorian clothing. Aged eight or so she had been sitting up reading in bed, Auntie Eileen snoozing beside her, so she was fully awake as far as she could remember. The visitation stood silently, silhouetted against the window for a short while, gazing out into the yard until my mother, after a stunned silence, called out in panic and the vision faded away to nothing never to be witnessed again.

Curious and, might I say, right up my ,Strasse'.

Of course many ghostly 'apparitions' seem to appear to people when they are in bed so you can't help wondering if it was all a dream of some kind now can you? Indeed, my mum wrote it off as such herself but perhaps she simply didn't want to scare me. There are even terms for such sightings. Hypnopompic hallucination, seeing something as you wake up that is and the opposite, hypnagogic hallucination, seeing something, obviously, as you drift off to sleep. These are recognised and genuine scientific phenomena. Disturbingly, though, both states are often accompanied by sleep paralysis. Not only is something creepy standing at the end of your bed but, damn me, you can't even reach out to switch the blessed light on. On occasion you might imagine hearing or, worse still, feeling something too. My other half Kevin gave me the heebie jebies a while back when he assured me he'd been awoken from a sound slumber one morning by someone whispering 'BOO' in his ear. That shocked him to consciousness well and truly as you might imagine. I also have two otherwise utterly sane friends who've told me that they saw a dark mass crawling towards them across their bedroom ceilings. Whatever it was then proceeded to sit on their chests rendering them unable to move. One was so shaken that she went to see her priest about it. These are classified by the medical community as night terrors and they can be caused by deficiencies in various minerals or vitamins or when going through a stressful period in your life. Not sure a dark mass sitting on your chest would help alleviate the latter but there you go. Trust me, you'll have seen a famous painting of this thankfully rare state of affairs. **The Nightmare**, painted in 1781 by Henry Fuseli<sup>5</sup>, it sums it up quite nicely I think. Apparently, if

normal sleep patterns are disturbed for whatever reason then the brain tries to shock you awake. Still being half asleep your muscles don't work normally, hence the inability to move, yet the brain is working overtime conjuring up something to jolt you out of your slumber. Some have attributed claims not just of ghostly apparitions but also those of alien abduction to just this very thing and, of course, more often than not this is quite true. Anyone who's watched the Netflix drama **EVIL** <sup>6</sup> will recognise dear old George in all this. Such hallucinations, be they visual, auditory or tactile, are common across the world, however, and have been recorded throughout the centuries dating right back into the mists of time. Research is ongoing concerning the pattern of brain activity which causes such visions as they affect many – patients suffering from schizophrenia, dementia and Parkinsons for example. If the region and cause can be isolated then such 'nightmares' might well be curable.

My brother Fran, though, had quite another explanation and one that I'm certainly prepared to give the time of day. What if, he used to say, it's at just such times, betwixt full consciousness and sleep, that we're afforded a glimpse 'behind the veil' into a world that exists beyond that of our usual awareness but obscured by the hustle and bustle of everyday life? Was mum given just such a glimpse all those years ago, along with many millions of others globally down through the centuries? Seeing something you can't explain is really not at all unusual you see. I've spoken to many people about this topic recently and, to put it mildly, it's amazed me how many of them claim to have seen something quite inexplicable. Very many indeed. They tend to keep 'stumm' about it all, unless asked specifically, for fear of ridicule. The irony is, however, that they'd find a wide and sympathetic audience nearly every time they spoke of their experiences. Barrack Yard is long gone of course, demolished in the early 1950s when new houses were built, but who knows how long it had stood there and what happened to those who lived there before? And it isn't the only odd thing to happen in that area, believe you me. Patience is a virtue though as they say.

So, it was bound to happen wasn't it? Poking around in all this history, people have been telling me about an odd atmosphere here or an aroma they pick up on sometimes there, catching the sight of something out the corner of their eye, or an odd sound that's been heard on various occasions. Well, what else could I do, but go and take a look for myself, ask them what they'd seen and look into the whole fascinating history of ghost lore while I was at it?

Right then, let's begin, and our first stop is, oddly, **Hamlet** by William Shakespeare...

### 'Like quills upon the fretful porpentine' <sup>7</sup>

Now I'm not a great expert on Shakespeare but, like many of us I suppose, I do appreciate that he was one of the greatest dramatists to have lived, despite receiving a pretty basic grammar school education and never having attended university. Numerous weighty tomes have been written about who he truly was, including a current one, surprise surprise, that suggests he was actually a she. He was regarded by some of his doubtless pretty envious contemporaries as too big for his Tudor boots and branded an '*Upstart Crowe*' <sup>8</sup>. Despite all of the difficulties life had dealt him, though, Shakespeare went on to be acclaimed and wealthy in his own lifetime and seriously revered in ours. He wrote much about the human condition, warts and all (not one of old Shaky's sayings but Oliver Cromwell's apparently <sup>9</sup>) and the turmoils we mere mortals must negotiate but the afterlife too? Well, yes actually, for what to make of ghosts and all that jazz was a thing of faith taken very seriously in the 1590s when he (or she...) wrote **Hamlet**.

It never takes long to get to the Tudors in any examination of English history, and it's usually one or both of those two old chestnuts Henry VIII and Elizabeth I we end up dealing with. Surprise, surprise here they are again. It always pleases me greatly though when I can add a German to the mix and I'm delighted to say this is one such occasion. Martin Luther, as you'll recall, had an issue with, amongst many other things, the sale of Indulgences by Catholic churchmen of his day. In a nutshell it was believed that, when you died, you initially went to a kind of celestial waiting room while it was decided whether your time on earth had been spent in a way that earned you access to Heaven or a fast ticket to Hell. It could take a fair old time for this decision to be

reached, centuries even, so a system was thoughtfully devised by certain Catholic bigwigs to speed up the decision making process. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century the Catholic Priest who became St Odilo of Cluny popularised All Soul's Day on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, a day henceforth set aside specifically to pray for the souls of deceased loved ones languishing in Purgatory. Some, however, went a step further and began to offer 'Indulgences' for sale with the proceeds going to the church. The 'intention' was to shorten your time and suffering in 'God's waiting room' and fill church coffers for subsequent 'good deeds'. In 1517 Pope Leo X got in on the act and offered Indulgences in exchange for the rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The ensuing aggressive marketing practices of one Johann Tetzel in support of this scheme proved to be the last straw for Martin Luther who, amongst others, felt this to be an abuse of power. And so he spoke up thank you very much, adding other grievances, which he duly wrote down and pinned to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg in 1517. He had tried a more diplomatic route beforehand of course, suggesting that his ninety five points be discussed calmly, but when that got him nowhere he went for more decisive action and the rest, as they say, is 'Geschichte'. For Luther it was about the true meaning of the Bible which states nowhere that such a place as Purgatory exists and so you couldn't buy your way out of it by slipping the church a fiver. Of course, if you had no money at all, there were only the prayers of friends and family to shorten your sojourn. Nunneries and monasteries grew out of this practise to some extent as each became a kind of prayer factory, the great and the good paying for the nuns and monks to say prayers on their behalf for hour upon tedious hour. The Catholic church had never sanctioned such practices officially but clearly turned something of a blind eye to it all but, eventually, selling Indulgences for money was outlawed by the Catholic authorities in 1567. The theory behind it goes on as I understand it, just, apparently without the 'filthy lucre'.

As for dear old Henry, the thought of saving a few bob by outlawing Indulgences never crossed his mind I'm sure. His aim, when creating his own Protestant church, as the name suggests, was to protest against such fiscal abuses. His intentions were entirely and 100% religious. The new Protestant church had no truck with Purgatory, Indulgences or revenge seeking spirits who popped back to earth to air their grievances. Henry's aims were pure and devout and he also had a pet flying pig.

And this is where **The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark**, to give it its full title, comes into play. Written around 1599 there was much debate about many ecclesiastical matters, both big and small, as they affected everyone in the country to a lesser or greater extent. Ghosts too were afforded their own share of debate. Now **Hamlet** is famously unsure about many things in the Danish court, among them the true nature of the Ghost who appears to him in the form of his father. The now dead former King appears to various characters, most notably Hamlet, telling him that he was the victim of murder at the hands of his very own brother Claudius who, in turn, has gone on to marry the now widowed queen Gertrude. Quite a melting pot of themes then: fratricide, incest (that old knotty issue of marrying your brother's widow and all that), revenge, indecision and greed. Goodness, and ghosts on top of it all? Absolutely. For a Catholic a ghost was commonly believed to be a spirit returning from Purgatory to request a favour or to have a wrong righted to facilitate its passage onwards to the final celestial resting place. Yet for a shiny new Protestant no such place as Purgatory existed so a ghost could only truly be a demon sent to trick the unsuspecting by the Devil himself. After death the spirit goes to Heaven or Hell and there simply is no coming back. Evidence has been found in ancient graves of bodies fixed into the ground with a stake, or buried upside down to ensure that they can't climb out of their graves to trouble the living. Such 'revenants' could, therefore, only be a trick sent by Satan himself. For others a ghost was a mere fiction, a manipulative prank played on you by someone for their own nefarious purposes, so what should poor Hamlet believe? Whichever way you look at it, then, the discussion of the Ghost's true nature is vital to the plot of what many regard as one of the greatest dramatic plays ever written. If it is his father's spirit come back for retribution then Hamlet is duty bound to avenge his murder. If it is a demon then he must ignore what he is being told. If it is a trickster then what might their motive be?

Blimey.

Ancient Egyptians wrote letters to the dead asking for help and advice. In ancient Rome the nine day festival of Parentalia on February 13<sup>th</sup> was a time to visit the dead with flowers, garlands, wheat and bread soaked in wine. Feralia nine days later on February 21<sup>st</sup> was a time to deal with the more troublesome departed who might cause issues if neglected. Failure to honour the departed, wrote Ovid, could lead to the dead rising from their graves. So the idea of a ghost seeking or needing help didn't begin or, indeed, end with Indulgences. In 1897 in Greenbrier, West Virginia, Elva Heaster Shue appeared to her mother claiming that she had been murdered by her husband Erasmus who had strangled her and then pushed her down the stairs. Her mother Mary Jane Heaster went to the prosecutor and, after much persuading, the exhumation of Elva's body showed that the wife had, indeed, been strangled as her ghost had insisted. This is the only known case of ghostly evidence being used in court when the prosecution tried to make Mary Jane a laughing stock by bringing up what she claimed to have seen. The husband was eventually found guilty and spent the rest of his natural in jail. Let's hope that Mary paid him the odd visit in the dead of night from time to time too.

Doubtless many of the Catholic faith still hold to their belief in Purgatory. Certainly the restless ghost idea has never truly left us even in 2024. Rather it has become quite a popular thing and I should warn you now that there will be spoilers coming up. Apologies if I ruin your next movie night.

Take **The Sixth Sense** for a modern day example. I saw this film for the first time in 1999 in Toronto of all places and my better half Kevin knew it would be just my thing as he knows my liking for the creepy. Not so much his cup of tea but, there you go, true love. Anyway, with an age rating of fifteen what could possibly be that scary? Don't be fooled, I'm pretty hardy when it comes to such matters but, blimey, what a shocker. Both of us spent the hour and a half jumping out of our skins (that scene in the tent, good grief...) but the ending soothed the whole business right down. You might recall the whispered tag line played in all of the trailers, '*I see dead people*'? Poor old Cole, our young hero, is plagued with a sixth sense which allows him to see ghosts in all their glory. Ones with horrible gunshot wounds. Ones hanging from a gibbet. Young ones, old ones, recently deceased ones, long dead ones. All very frightening for a young boy until, that is, he discovers their true intentions with the help of his psychologist Dr Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis actually). These spirits are coming to ask for his help, seeking him out to right a wrong or pass on a message just like Hamlet's dear old dad or the Greenbrier Ghost. Once he knows this, life is easier and night time visits to the loo far less stressful. And to top it all off we get to view the afterlife from the ghost's perspective. Of that bit I say no more, however, I'm not that mean spirited, no pun intended.

Now, in the modern world, with so much scientific discovery common knowledge, about the creation of the universe and the Big Bang theory, the composition of our very DNA and the splitting of the atom, do many of us still believe in the spirit world? Well, as mentioned previously, they most certainly do and the entertainment business knows this only too well. Many a tale continues to be told about the 'Other Side' in the knowledge that there is money to be made by scaring an audience half to death in a safe environment for a short period of time. **The Sixth Sense** was the second highest grossing film of 1999. **The Others** <sup>10</sup>, another film with the ghosts themselves at the centre of the action, was the fourth biggest grossing film in 2001 and the list goes on. Not all the spooky films are creepy of course, take **Ghost** <sup>11</sup> as an example. Patrick Swayze, Demi Moore and that old pottery wheel, not frightening at all and the highest grossing film of 1990 at \$505 million. Others go on and on being reinvented and rehashed. **Ghostbusters** <sup>12</sup> has spawned four movies already with a fifth due out this year (yippee!) and two TV series.

And so I come to my next mention of Nassington, well, two mentions actually. Remember if you will that one theory of what a ghost may be is that it's a spirit popping round to interact with the living? In Hamlet's case, dear old dad has a serious purpose but others might just call in to let you

know that they're keeping their eye on what you're up to or to slip you a bit of information from 'the other side'.

I begin with 21 Station Road, known as The Thatch. Alec Jackson wrote an account of Nassington life a few years ago and, amongst all of the factual information he makes mention of his grandmother who once lived in this very building. In one seemingly innocuous paragraph he recalls sitting with his mum, gran and brother there having lunch when the latch on the kitchen door clicked open briefly and then shut itself, the event clearly unsettling his mother. At this point, though, perhaps I should let him speak for himself:

*'Some years later I was there with grandma when that door did the same thing. She looked at me and again, quite calmly, said 'That'll be Maria gone'. She was correct. A couple of days later the little envelope with the black edges arrived with its card to tell us that her eldest sister had died. Subsequently I was always very conscious of that door...'*

Now, Sarah Chapman and her partner Steve Russell live there currently and we had a conversation about this particular piece of information when I visited her home a few months back. Fortunately Sarah brought up the subject herself by commenting on the positive atmosphere in the property so she was not concerned but rather intrigued by this snippet of information. Could it be that Grannie Jackson had a particular gift for predicting people's passing? Was it just good old common sense, guessing that the person in question was seriously ill so might well shake off their mortal coil pretty soonish? Or was she being informed somehow about an unexpected death? The information in Alec's memoir doesn't, sadly, go into such detail but it makes for interesting speculation. The door in question is still there at The Thatch, the very same one. Sarah and her partner Steve have not noticed it opening of its own volition unfortunately but, intriguingly, he at least has added to a further slightly eerie tale connected to the same property.

A previous owner, pretty recently, didn't stay in there for all that long. She was a bit shaken by waking (yes, I know) to find a spectre at the end of her bed dressed as a cavalier who then proceeded to disappear through the wall. Very flamboyant but also pretty creepy. She moved out fairly soon afterwards understandably. I mentioned this to Sarah and Steve when I visited and, again, they'd seen nothing, not at that point anyway. So, fast forward a few months and there I am in the Village Hall ahead of a talk by Stuart Orme. Sarah and Steve were there too. She caught me in the refreshments queue. *'Speak to Steve'* she said, *'he's seen the cavalier'*. Sure enough he seems to think he has. Minding his own business one evening he said, watching TV, he spotted something out of the corner of his eye – the cavalier, murky and indistinct but, to him, clearly there. Never rub your eyes, or look away, guaranteed to make the apparition disappear and so it did, but he's pretty convinced something had made its presence known. Now, to quote the marvellous Danny Robbins <sup>13</sup> and *'Uncanny'*, Team Sceptic will say I had planted the idea in his head, or that he had nodded off during a particularly dull episode of *Countryfile*. Team Believer would counter, however, that he had been afforded a brief glimpse behind that veil too when he was not particularly focused on the conscious world. Indeed, up until this point, he would have classed himself as a member of Team Sceptic but now he isn't so sure much to Sarah's delight.

Of course The Thatch is only a couple of doors down from Mould's The Butchers. You may be aware that this has been a family business, begun by Great Uncle George, along with his wife Mary, in the late 1890s or so. When he moved in to where Rachele Mould now lives he, as was the custom back then, placed a coin in the wooden beam above the fire, dated with the year of their arrival. This was pretty common back in the day, the Coin Ceremony originating from an old maritime tradition called 'Stepping the Mast'. Dating back to Roman times, a coin would be placed under the mast of a new boat to bring protection and good luck. The idea caught on amongst land lubbers and, in old houses with large, often cracked, beams, coins would be pushed in to bring luck or, in the case of George Mould, to commemorate significant family events such as births and weddings too. Rachele showed me what is now her beam, crammed with all manner of coins, and it's a tradition they still honour today. On occasion, due to environmental factors

perhaps, the coins do drop out. But on one occasion at least there might have been another explanation.

Many of you will remember Steven Mould who died, sadly, in 2021 aged just 59. I was at school with Steven and worked with him briefly at The Black Horse years ago. If I saw him around and about we would chat and so it was something of a shock to learn that he had died at such a young age. One evening, sitting by the fire a year or two later, Rachelle heard something fall. The beam across the fire is not the only one with coins in it you see but also the one running parallel to it across the length of the room. I suppose, if you were being pedantic, you would see this as a secondary beam in terms of the coins and, perhaps, Steven did too. The one that fell, you see, was dated 1962, the year of his birth.

Coincidence? Maybe. But other odd things happen around and about the butcher's too, the kind of potential 'visitations' we have mentioned already.

You'll remember I said that smells can be a sign of a haunting, a familiar one that you associate with someone who has died? Great Aunt Mary likes to make her presence known on occasion too, checking in you might say, when something significant is about to happen. Various members of the family have noticed it, that whiff of paraffin. She used to walk around at night with a small paraffin lamp to see by and, it seems, she continues to do so when something special is about to happen. Not that often as it turns out, but often enough for the family to comment that it's '*just Great Aunt Mary*' on her travels.

Make of that what you will.

### **'I hope this is as close to hell as I ever get'** <sup>14</sup>

So, back to all these films, TV dramas and the like, just harmless, innocent fun? Well, yes, in the main I think so but others fall more into the trickster category old Hamlet was concerned about too. Indeed some leave a very nasty taste in the mouth and here I would turn your attention to the **Amityville** movie and book series and the most recent offspring, the **Conjuring** franchise.

You may well not have seen **The Amityville Horror** but I bet you've heard of it. Not my cup of tea as the special effects department had rather too much of a field day with walls churning out green ooze and fake blood, all very silly. Anyway, it was damned popular in its day but the story behind the whole thing is pretty cynical.

Let's begin with the facts. George Lutz and his second wife Kathleen and her children moved into 112 Ocean Drive in Long Island New York State, a three storey house which they eventually purchased for \$80,000. The estate agent did tell them that the family who had lived there previously, the Defeo family, had all been murdered by Ronnie, the eldest son, and there were still bullet holes in the walls and some bloodstains on the carpet when they viewed the property. Having discussed the matter with the children beforehand it was decided that they could rise above its past history and so they moved into '*High Hopes*' in 1974.

Now, just hang on there. The previous family was shot to death? You wouldn't see me for dust in such a place but there you go, no accounting for taste. In they went, even keeping some of the furniture left behind by the ill-fated family but they didn't stay for long. Twenty eight days in total actually, driven out, so they claimed, by an evil presence that wanted to have the house back to itself. They fled in the middle of the night, leaving their things behind them and the fridge full of food, to a hotel and would eventually sell the property back to the bank, reluctant to sell it on to another family with a clear conscience. They then decided to get as far away as possible from the 'evil' and went to California

Of course the Defeo family was not afforded the luxury of flight. At 3:15am on November 13<sup>th</sup> 1974 both parents, three daughters and two sons were shot in their beds without anyone hearing the dog barking wildly and the gunshots. The murders took place over two floors but mysteriously no one had stirred from their beds. The eldest son Ronnie was eventually charged with the murders and, although he changed his story over the years to claim either the mafia had wiped out his family with more than one hit man, or his eldest sister had killed five of them before he grabbed the gun and shot her in self defence, he would never claim that there had been any supernatural involvement. Doctors said at his trial that he suffered from paranoid psychosis. He was also a drug user who drank heavily so the finger certainly pointed in his direction.

A subsequent family, the Cromartys, eventually bought the property after the Lutz family but they too moved away pretty swiftly. Not due to ghosts or evil presences though. They regarded the house as one with a friendly atmosphere. Oh no, it wasn't the dead that drove them away but rather the living. After the film **The Amityville Horror** came out in 1979 sightseers to the property turned living there into a nightmare.

Now, while in prison, Ronnie Defeo's defense attorney came to visit him. Ronnie claimed that the lawyer stated that there was money to be made out of the story and would he contribute to the tale? George Lutz and his family had begun to tell of their experiences during their twenty-eight day life there you see, and it all seemed very timely. They told of a child ghost who only their daughter Missy could see. A photograph was eventually taken showing a mysterious figure looking around the corner of a door which seemed to give credence to her claim. They told of loud noises and screaming, being awoken at 3:15 am <sup>22</sup>. Windows would slam down, trapping one of the children's hands on one occasion, and his wife's appearance changed to that of an old woman. They had called on the services of a priest, Rev. Ralph Pecorano, who had been told to '**GET OUT!**' by an otherworldly voice causing him to flee and never come back. Sensibly, you may think, he did precisely that.

To get it out of their system and not to have to keep revisiting the whole creepy business George and Kathy Lutz made twenty six tape recordings of their experiences. These were eventually passed on to their ghost writer (literally) Jay Anson and, along with his own interview with the priest, a book appeared. Now he certainly elaborated on what he had been told. Suddenly there were tales of levitation, swarms of flies and oozing walls and many former friends distanced themselves from the Lutz family. When the film was made, though, George and Kathy Lutz appeared on TV shows with the actors to emphasise that the basis of the film was true if not all of the detail and in 1979 it was released. Wherever it was shown on that first weekend there were long, long queues of people wanting to see it. People had a taste for such things you see, back in the 1970s. Films of this type and reportings of unnatural abilities were big box office. The 'Unholy Trinity' of **The Omen**, **'Rosemary's Baby'** and **'The Exorcist'** <sup>15</sup> all came out in quick succession. Uri Geller was bending spoons on *Parkinson*. Sales of tarot cards went through the roof as too did those for ouija boards (more of those later). To release a movie about a 'real' case couldn't fail now could it? Indeed. And it wasn't just the one film either, there were sequels, many of them, and books too. Forty five films actually, using Amityville in the title to lure in the punters. And quite apart from the movies and all those connected with them, careers have been launched by involvement with the tale. While looking into the truth of the claims numerous psychics and demonologists visited the property for séances and the like, most notably Ed and Lorraine Warren, their exploits subsequently dramatised in **The Conjuring** series of films. On one such occasion Lorraine famously said '*I hope this is as close to hell as I ever get*' when visiting the upstairs sewing room.

But what of the family and, in particular, Ronnie Defeo, who received six life sentences for second degree murder? George Lutz it seems, according to a psychiatric report, suffered from a personality disorder. He was convinced that his oldest stepson had attracted the evil presence in their house in Amityville and that it had followed the family to California. He was also convinced that the boy had mental powers and was trying to kill him by mind control. He would eventually die

of a heart attack, driven to desperation by the numerous law suits with which he became embroiled. As for Ronnie Defeo he felt hard done by. He claimed that the films had ruined his chances of being paroled and that he should be compensated for his situation from the profits of the film. He would die in prison in 2021.

And the Defeo family? It seems to me that the tragedy of this murdered family has been all but forgotten. With an eye on the filthy lucre lawyers, prisoners, mediums, psychics and any number of others have all set out to profit from a horrible crime and turn it into nothing more than Saturday night titillation. Or have they? There is still a nagging doubt. What really did happen in that house for that twenty eight day period? Why did the Lutz parents pay for reputable experts to give them each a polygraph test, which, by the way, they passed with flying colours? Why take part in TV discussion shows about the events? Why flee at all?

So, judging by this kind of case then, people just dream up tales of '*ghoulies and ghosties and long legged beasties*'<sup>16</sup> as a sure fire way, at one end of the scale, to entertain or, at the other, to cash in on some primitive interest in the nether world of spirits that we share with peoples throughout the world, is that it? We all know that death, like taxes and Christmas, is inevitable, so what is more natural than hoping for something on the other side? Maybe so, but I can't help but feel that, if this were all we were dealing with, then the whole thing would have been categorically disproven many, many years ago and we would all know better. But it hasn't now, has it?

Far from it in fact. Just take a glance at the movies or radio and TV shows on offer about 'the other side' and paranormal activity and you'll see what I mean. I'm not the only one fascinated by the subject, no indeed. One of the most recent offerings, both on the radio and the TV is the aforementioned *Uncanny* hosted by Danny Robins or the TV comedy *Ghosts* which ran for five series, all courtesy of the highly respectable BBC. So what might we all be dealing with then? Ghosts come to warn us, interact with us or ask for help à la Hamlet? Night terrors and tricks of the mind? Scams and made-up tales? Environmental or otherwise rational explanations?

Or the real thing?

**'There are more things in heaven and earth, dear Horatio, than dreamed of in your philosophy.'**<sup>17</sup>

One school of thought claims that hauntings or ghostly tales are a way for a community to remember some tragic event that occurred in a building or a location. What began as a story oft repeated eventually becomes remembered, a few generations down the line perhaps, as a ghost story. Rarely is a spooky tale about a smiling entity giving you a jaunty wave as they vanish into the brickwork after all. Far more frequently we are dealing with angry male ghosts scaring the bejesus out of someone in the dead of night or a weeping, broken-hearted woman clad in black or grey revisiting the place of her death, be it by her own hand or that of an evil cad. Then there are the White Ladies that appear in tales around the world, *La Llorana* in Mexico for example. Her tale has been told since as early as 1550 and is that of a wailing woman, full of revenge, who haunts watery places. She is said to have drowned her own children in a jealous rage over a philandering husband and, should you hear her cry, your life will be forever blighted. This puts me in mind of a far more modern version of a similar tale. '**The Woman in Black**' was firstly a 1983 novel by Susan Hill and then a 1987 play by Stephen Malatrat (the second longest play to have run in the West End). A film starring Daniel Radcliffe was released in 2012 and an ITV Christmas ghost story screened on Christmas Eve 1989. Check one of them out but, trust me, the latter is by far the worst. Only watch with all the lights on and only then with someone near at hand. And don't expect to sleep for a month or two.

More often, and far more creepily, the ghostly tale involves the ill treatment or death of a child and it is here that we return close to home once more.



You may be aware that Nassington once boasted seven pubs, yes, you read that right, seven. There will come a time when I'll regale you with stories from within their various snugs but for today I am limiting myself to just the one.

Now The Three Mill Bills stands opposite the green area next to the church and the name is still above the door. I vaguely remember going in there myself once with my dad who regarded it as his local when I was about three years old. He was in their darts team if I recall and we used to have the cups to prove how good they all were. It remained as a pub until the late 1960s and was later transformed into a private home in 1971 by Gerard and Jane Homan. Prior to this there was a succession of landlords and their families working and living in the pub as part of the village. Sid 'Sticker' Jackson and his wife ran the pub from 1945 for example, until moving to the New Inn in Peterborough, at which point Mr and Mrs Godwin took over in 1957. So far, so normal but, again, I have a sad tale to impart and one which, surprisingly, I've only just learned about in the past few months.

The Jackson's daughter Diana Jane got up one Thursday in March 1955 to make her way to the village school as usual. Tragically she would never make it there as she suffered an epileptic fit from which she didn't recover. She was just seven years old. Her death was completely unexpected and the family, understandably, devastated. Her funeral was held in Kettering and attended by her grieving family but also the then Headmaster Mr Wasse, her class teacher Miss Devereaux, and various of her classmates and other people from the village. And my mum. Now I suspect that she was there representing my dad who would have been at work on a Thursday but what surprised me is that I don't recall her ever mentioning the event to me at all. You may have realised by now that she and the rest of my family were full of tales and stories about the village, usually told over numerous cups of tea but, for some reason, she omitted to mention anything about this. Had it not been for Jo Cooper telling me how she remembered all the children being sent home from school on the day that Diana died then the whole thing might have passed me by. But it didn't, so I've done a little digging. *The Stamford Mercury* reported the details on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 1955 and, after giving some background information, stated that Diana was eventually cremated. I've since been told that her ashes were scattered in the Three Mill Bills garden. So far so sad then but nothing that unusual you might say. Here, though, the plot thickens just a little.

Fast forward to 1971. John Miller was one of the workmen dealing with the transformation of the building from a pub to a home. They were instructed to remove the inglenook fireplace one Friday and did so, he told me, despite their misgivings as voiced to the architect. The concern was that there might ensue damage to the property but their concerns were ignored and so remove it they did and left for a, no doubt, well earned weekend of rest. Well, you've guessed it, come Monday morning they were unable to open the front door as, unsurprisingly, the interior of the building had collapsed inwards. I remember my brother Toni, also a builder but not on this property, telling me that this did, indeed, happen. Gone was the staircase that once led upstairs, gone various other features, and gone the smile on the architect's face. It took a while to clear the rubble away but, once it had been consigned to an outside area, they were able to get back to work. One sunny lunchtime (for a builder, about 11am), four of them were sitting in what had once been the bar area enjoying a cuppa and a cheese and tomato sarnie. The room was well lit. The area completely empty. Everything seemed normal until all four of them distinctly heard something, or someone, heading up the now non-existent stairs dragging something along behind it. They fled, all four of them, grown men as they were, and it was with some reluctance, and a good while later, that they ventured back inside.

Wonderful. This tale, of course, made me prick up my ears and so I decided to ask around a bit further. I didn't have to go too far as it turned out as my old pal Jayne Marshall (née Barwell) whose mum Anne lives right next door to me, used to babysit for the Homans as a teenager and did so there. Over a cuppa and a cheese scone the subject of the Three Mill Bills came up. Yes indeed, she said, she certainly felt uncomfortable there and after just one evening watching the children said to the Homans that she'd only be back again if she could bring someone with her.

Now I know asking if your boyfriend can join you in a nice, comfortable home with a well stocked fridge far away from your prying parents for the evening might be construed in other ways but, she assured me, it was nothing of the sort but rather due to the uncomfortable feeling she had about the place. She didn't see anything out of the ordinary, nor hear anything unusual, but just felt as though she was being watched.

Well now.

So I have to delve a bit more do I not? Next to move in was Mrs Hopkinson who lived there for twenty years or so. Angela Gibson (née Coston) both worked and, as Mrs Hopkinson grew frailer, cared for her and, during a recent conversation I asked if she had sensed anything unusual in the place. She didn't often stay overnight she said, but it was odd that things used to be moved about with everyone assuming someone else had moved them, pots of flowers for example. The mother would 'blame' one of her daughters and they in turn, would 'blame' mum. All a bit odd *'now I come to think of it'*, said Angela. Hmm. Next came Stuart Fenn who lived there not that long ago so I got in touch just to see what he had to say about the whole creepy business. Nothing really he admitted, he'd had no bad vibes nor nightly visitations from spooks of any kind, but he had been told by someone that the place was haunted by a child.

Next we come to Jane Homan herself who, along with her then husband Gerard, had the place renovated in the first place. What I haven't done in these cases is barge in with a loaded question like *'Is your house haunted?'* or something equally crass but rather wait to see if any information is actually volunteered, as was the case at The Thatch you'll recall. Far more reliable don't you agree? So, when asking about the layout of the place out it came. Bars downstairs, one staircase going up, hayloft on one side and three bedrooms on the other, the stairs leading to a small bedroom which she found uncomfortable to be in, cold and a bit creepy. So there you have it.

Or do you?

As I go along and visit people and friends about the village I tend to tell them who I've spoken to or where I've been. This includes, of course, those I've discussed matters with already and enter the friend I mentioned in my last piece about the sacred places all around us. She was the one I took along to view the items in the former Saxon burial site as she, along with the many others in the village as previously mentioned, is particularly sensitive to matters of this nature. She looked pretty quizzical as I was talking about The Three Mill Bills story and was rather quiet. *'Do you mean the building opposite that green area next to the church?'* she asked, *'we used to play there as children. We'd go into the area behind the pub too, no one seemed to mind. Now you come to mention it I used to see a little girl there, running towards the shed near the house. I always wondered why we didn't play with her or ask her to join in. I didn't recognise her as a village child and when I mentioned her my other friends hadn't noticed her'*. How often had she spotted her I asked. *'A couple of times I suppose, but I never went over to her'*.

Strange.

Now the jury is always out on these things as nothing can be categorically proven in either direction can it? The current owners Annie and Jamie have also had no signs of anything untoward anymore than Stuart or Annabel de Capell Brooke who lived there before Annie and Jamie, or Jean Wilson (née Sharman) who worked for a while for the Homans. Maybe, though, they aren't 'in tune' with 'the other side'? Or maybe it's just an old building full of draughts, creaky floorboards and rattling pipes? Environmental considerations cannot be left out after all. Wonky foundations, especially in such an old house. Pipes and boilers rumbling in the middle of the night. Carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide have been shown to induce dizziness, nausea and hallucination as too has asbestos and copper piping. If copper from any source begins to build up in the system it can lead to anxiety, depression and psychosis accompanied by hallucinations. Wilson's Disease is an hereditary condition that causes copper levels to build up resulting in

various problems including hallucinations. Too much copper can be absorbed by perfectly healthy people by drinking contaminated water or eating acidic foods cooked in uncoated copper cookware. And although we may not notice them that much, Britain does experience the odd earthquake too. Now, having studied for a Masters Degree in Los Angeles (I know, very glam, I sure had a good tan at the end of that one believe you me) I can identify an earthquake pretty easily. I remember the first one I experienced very clearly. Snoozing away in bed, having a perfectly nice dream about kittens or cake or some such, I was rudely awakened by an all enveloping shuddering. I knew instantly what it was. Weird. Some primitive sense I suppose and, sure enough, when I looked out of the window, the swimming pool outside (again, I know, fab or what?) was sloshing back and forth as if a force nine gale was blowing. Now, my somewhat over excitable Spanish flatmate Teresa was, by this point, in something of a histrionic lather but my upbringing came to the rescue. I'm pretty calm in a crisis you see, stiff upper lip and all that, so I managed to calm her down with, what else, a cup of tea, albeit a weak American version. All soon returned to its unshuddering normal state. This quake turned out to have been a point 8 on the Richter Scale, so fairly sizeable. Since returning to Blighty I've noticed at least one very minor quake in Nassington a few years back and, it would seem, that there are 20-30 earthquakes in the UK annually big enough to be felt by someone. Or to shake things off the shelves and walls. And a fair few quakes are picked up only by sensitive instruments but they happen nonetheless. The area between Leicester and Carlisle experiences almost continuous seismic activity believe it or not and the last big earthquake in the UK was a 5.2 in 2008. Serious damage does, on occasion, ensue:

*More than a thousand buildings in Colchester and surrounding villages were destroyed in an earthquake on the morning of 22 April 1884. Estimated to have measured 4.6 on the Richter Scale, the quake lasted only a matter of seconds but damaged houses, shops and churches. One church in Colchester lost its spire.... fissures, yards long, opened up in some roads.*

**BBC History Magazine, July 2024, p.39.**

By the by, in case you ever need to know and to share a little of my Californian training, all you need to do is hide under a table or under the door lintel should a serious earthquake hit the Northamptonshire area. Just saying.

Whichever way you look at it, though, what we can say for sure is that a very young girl passed away in tragic circumstances in the 1950s in our community. If nothing else her story, like that of the Blott Whitney children in the century before, has now been remembered albeit in a cursory manner. Whether she does, indeed, reappear on purpose on occasion to be seen or sensed by those with a feel for such things is something for you to make your own mind up about.

I for one hope that she does.

### **A cup of tea to steady your nerves.**

And so we come to a further school of thought. Not far away from the former Three Mill Bills is Elsie's Vintage Tea Room. If you haven't visited yet, why ever not? Anyway, I remember it as Rowles Shop until the mid 1980s but I only remember the building next door, now Poppy Cottage, as the storage room for the shop. Jayne worked there too when Ella Rowles ran the place and hated going in for a box of Walkers Crisps or to stock up on Kunzel Cakes or Corona Dandelion and Burdock or whatever due to the mice. Anyway, digressing. Before it was simply part of the shop though it was home to Hull's Bakery. We had two in the village back in the day, Dixons Bakery at the bottom end and Billy Hulls at the top. What with all the food outlets, the laundry, numerous farms, seven pubs, a blacksmith's forge, three shops and goodness knows what else I have to tell you about you can see what I mean about people not needing to use the station to find employment outside of the village. Joe Ward was the delivery man. He used to cycle over to work from Apethorpe each day to take the bread around the top end of the village and outlying ones too

and, during the heavy winter of 1947 ventured to his home village to deliver their bread when others would not. Quite a hot bed of activity all things considered then. So, a bakery at the top end of the village which had flour and sundry items coming in and bread and various other items going out, day upon day, week upon week, regular as clockwork. All very efficient and simple and nothing untoward then?

Have you heard of *Stone Tape Theory* though? This is one I have a lot of time for as it seems to have a logic to it that I can bend my head around. It's always amazed me that a bit of paper, a few chemicals, light and energy can produce an image of someone that will exist long after they have died. A photograph. We just take them for granted but what might a chap from 1624 have made of such a thing? The Devil's work? Witchcraft? Magic? How about a cassette tape recording (sorry kids, ask your grandparents)? A strip of plastic, energy to make it work, the press of a couple of buttons and, hey presto, you can record the sound of the Top 40 on a Sunday evening from Radio 1 to play back as often as you like or until the damn thing unspools and you have to sort it out with a pencil (again, ask your grandparents). And not just music, voices too. How many of us, when we received our very first cassette players, recorded family members on them? If only we'd had the sense to keep those tapes, of mum or gran or Uncle Harold. Video recorders, cine cameras, answering machines, phone cameras, a multitude of gadgets, powered by simple forms of energy onto paper or plastic or a chip inside the phone and, again, someone long gone has been captured for, potentially these days at least, eternity.

So why, then, might not the same be true of buildings?

Now, the *Stone Tape Theory* is a suggestion that ghosts and hauntings are akin to similar recordings but this time onto the fabric of a building. Traumatic events, or repeated actions over a period of time, are projected in the form of energy and recorded into brickwork, rocks or walls and then replay themselves under certain atmospheric conditions. Although the idea was popularized in a 1972 Christmas ghost story '*The Stone Tape*', it in turn was based on theories expounded by 19<sup>th</sup> century intellectuals and psychic researchers. The archaeologist and parapsychologist T.C. Letherbridge, although he didn't coin the phrase, believed that hauntings had nothing to do with the spirits of the deceased, communing with us or otherwise, but rather something like a movie which we could not interact with. There are various tales of ghosts appearing from the waist up only, walking on a floor which has been raised long since, or disappearing through walls where once there had been a door. Severed ghosts are quite the thing you know. Many former battlefields are said to be haunted and, in other cases, legions of Roman troops and the like have reportedly been seen marching silently through walls along a road that no longer exists. They do not stop for a chat. They do not notice us at all. What they do they have done many, many times before as they did in life and we, perhaps, snatch a mere glimpse of them when conditions are just so. Now, you might have dismissed this whole idea outright already but quartz may well play a role in all this and there are serious researchers out there looking into this very thing as you read. Quartz is often used in a variety of building materials and, intriguingly, it is also a common component in devices such as mobile phones, television receivers, watches and clocks. Quartz, apparently, exerts an electric charge under pressure, otherwise known as piezoelectricity, and not just quartz either. Zinc oxide. Lead zirconate, barium and lead titanate. Ceramics too and even bone. So, if an entity requires energy to manifest itself, willingly or otherwise, might not piezoelectricity be involved?

At this point enter Mrs Jensen.

Now, you'll have noticed the bungalows in St Mary's Close? They stand where once Barrack Yard used to be and my mum mentioned on various occasions how noisy, and pretty frightening too I imagine, it was when 'the horses used to get into the yard'. Again, I didn't have the sense to ask her which horses she was referring to but I suspect they had a lot to do with Mr Hull and his bakery business as he would have used a horse and cart for all the tooting and froing. Now Olive Jensen used to live in the second bungalow along, albeit briefly, that is at the back of Poppy

Cottage. When a bakery the back area would have been just the place for a cart and horse to get in and out of for the aforementioned reasons and not just on an isolated occasion. It would have been happening over and over and over again.

One evening, about 3 am she awoke because of quite a racket coming from outside her bedroom window. We've had mention of this sort of time before you may recall. The time between 3am and 4am is, according to the Team Believer community, the actual witching hour rather than midnight as many may assume. 3am is, you see, in direct opposition to the time of Jesus' crucifixion which was said to have taken place at 3pm. So, getting up to see what all the commotion was about Mrs Jensen was startled to see, after drawing her curtains and peering out, a horse and cart disappearing through the wall. When renovating the property from a storeroom to a home Graham and his son Daniel uncovered the wear marks of cart wheels on the floor in the back of the property in the right neck of the woods for this tale. Obviously they've long since been covered over with new flooring but they did take photographs. Fingers crossed they find them again as I for one really want to take a look. Now what Olive actually saw we may never know but she certainly believed enough to tell Graham the story herself. She also mentioned it to her daughter Andrea who, luckily for me, lives just around the corner. Yes, she did remember her mentioning something about it all she recalled. Not only that but she was *'that sort of person'* and had spent a lifetime seeing the occasional unusual event. Hmm. Back to having a feel for such things I suspect which, depending on your opinion, is an interesting trait to have. I'd be scared half witless if I saw anything definitive I'm sure but, oh boy, would I like to have some proof. And Graham, and Clare too for that matter. They were certainly prepared to listen for they, in their turn, have some tales to tell about their home, The Emporium, and Elsie's Vintage Tea Room too.

So, Mr Rowles, or 'Dadda' as he was known around the village. I don't remember him myself but I know from mum that he was something of a pianist and that he played the organ at the *'Zionist Chapel'* as she put it (I'll explain about all that next year when our history travels take us to the Second World War). Valerie Hunter (née Rusdale) recalled having piano lessons with him, and how her friends would peep in through the window to try and make her laugh. I managed to find Mr Rowles' obituary and it would seem that he was a Nassington boy through and through being born right here in the village. His father James Rowles bought what became the shop in 1915 and three generations would run it in their time. Up until this point James had been a tailor and another of his sons continued that line of work in the house next to the school. Archibald did indeed play the organ in the Chapel, beginning when he was a mere ten years old no less and continuing until he was eighty two. Now that's dedication. Music was evidently very important to him as he studied at the Royal Academy of Music where he earned both the LRAM (Licentiate of the Royal College of Music, the highest award) and FTCL (Fellow of Trinity College of Music). On returning to the village he gave recitals alongside teaching the piano from his front room and leading the village choir. We have a fair few images of him and his fellow chorister, amongst them my gran Elsie Black, being photographed with the various awards that they won over the years so clearly they were a talented bunch. Quite apart from all this he was on the Parish Council until 1962 and secretary of the Nassington and Yarwell Garden Society. Phew, exhausting. Lots of irons in lots of fires then, plenty to keep a weather eye on you might say. Anyway, he and his wife ran Rowles Shop as it became until, eventually, their daughter Ella took over as shopkeeper until 1991 and she I remember very well indeed. I have very fond memories of dear Ella and her cat, who liked to sleep on the cheese and ham slicer (the cat, not Ella). All in all then, as a family, they had a deep involvement in the life of the village dating back a few generations. Now, you may be aware that Graham and Clare have hosted the occasional psychic reading event in Elsie's. They are certainly Team Believer. If asked they are perfectly happy to tell you about their dealings with both Archibald Rowles and Ella over the time that they have lived in the Emporium next door because, you see, it seems that neither one has ever been able to leave the place for good. The psychics they have hosted at Elsie's have picked up on Archibald and Ella too. Mr Rowles was a pipe smoker you see. Now, one of the most common ways to identify the presence of a 'ghost' is through scent as mentioned. Usually it seems that the odours are pleasant ones, flowers or perfume perhaps, but often something associated with that particular person, Great Aunt Mary's

paraffin lamp for example, like an otherworldly signature almost. Graham and Clare have both smelt pipe smoke on their landing on a few occasions and assume it to be just Archibald having a wander around, checking up to see all is well perhaps or more likely, rerunning his evening routine as he had done in life for year upon year. As for Ella, well, she is more likely to make her presence known by turning on the downstairs taps it seems. Both of them seem to enjoy moving things around so that, when you come back into the room, something has been put somewhere else. Curious but, let's face it, intriguing too.

Go on, admit it.

Of course, non-interactive hauntings could be explained in a scientific way, albeit one that some might consider as fringe. Let me introduce you to Block Universe theory.

So, imagine that we live, in effect, in a block of four spatial dimensions, namely **height** (up and down), **depth** (forward and backward), **width** (side to side) and also, crucially, **time** (past, present and future). In this theory time is not linear. It does not flow forward but rather, everything that comes into existence and happens, continues to exist, even if we no longer perceive it. The universe, in this theory, consists of everything that has ever been with present events adding to the long tail of events behind us all and stretching on into what will be. If you are prepared to accept this as a possibility, then precognition, déjà vu and premonitions are explicable at one end of the scale, and ghost sightings and voices picked up by EVP monitors <sup>30</sup> at the other. The question is, though, how some people seem to tune into such things. Do we only get to see events close to us in time, explaining why no-one ever seems to spot a ghost dinosaur? As William Shatner would say, '*Weird or What?*' <sup>19</sup>. Now some of you are sitting there thinking she's moved into the realm of the ridiculous and I can see why you might think that but, again, in times of doubt, I turn to a German:

*'Since there exists in this four dimensional structure...no longer any sections which represent 'now' objectively, the concepts of happening and becoming are indeed not completely suspended, but yet complicated. It appears, therefore, more natural to think of physical reality as four dimensional existence, instead of, as hitherto, the evolution of a three dimensional existence'*

**ALBERT EINSTEIN, Relativity 1952.**

So, oft repeated actions printing themselves on the fabric of a building? Well yes, perhaps. A brief glimpse from within our 'block' of a previous event that we have somehow been able to perceive, going on as it does all around us but usually unnoticed? Again, perhaps. But moving things around to be troublesome does not fall into this view of things. Ella and Archibald are just making their presence known perhaps but sometimes the interaction with objects can be far more troublesome. Stone Tape Theory is all about non-interactive events as too is Block Theory. Disruption is far more akin to poltergeist activity and here we branch off to pastures new.

**'I hear you knocking...'** <sup>20</sup>

So, poltergeists. I'll start here by putting my German teacher, *Hut* back on and explain that this is a compound noun comprising of the verb, *poltern*, meaning to make a lot of noise, and the noun, *Geist*, meaning a ghost or spirit. Prior to a wedding the Germans often have a *Polterabend* during which all the crockery you've put to one side during the year, because it's chipped or mismatched, is hurled with gusto onto the floor to symbolise the end of the newlyweds single status and the beginning of their new life together. And there'll be beer too, lots of it, and dancing, lots of that too, and a bit of schnapps to make it all go with a swing. Anyway, a poltergeist is, thus, a noisy ghost who enjoys throwing things around and, quite clearly, making its presence known. Foul smells are associated with poltergeist activity as too are flickering lights and spontaneous fires, pinching and biting.

For many, such hauntings begin after a short, calm, period in a new home. It is as if the spirit is sizing you up in some fashion before it starts to have some fun. Usually it begins slowly, with a few noises perhaps. Footsteps are an extremely common first sign of many hauntings. You go to the door to see who has come down the stairs, or go up the stairs to see who is stomping around in the room above, only to find that no one, or at least no one you can see, is there. You might write this off as one of the many aforementioned earthquakes we clearly enjoy in the UK, or the dodgy pipes that the estate agent didn't mention. Subsidence maybe, or a draught through a fireplace. If yours is an old property then you could explain it away to yourself as the house settling for the night. Over time, though, disturbances get harder to explain. Another common occurrence is the opening of doors. You leave the kitchen, for example, and go back seconds later having remembered why you went there in the first place only to find that every single cupboard door is now miraculously open. It would seem that poltergeists are often attracted by or able to manipulate teenagers and teenage girls in particular. The most common such event in the UK is probably the *Enfield Poltergeist* case that centred on 284 Green Street in Brimsdown, London. Between 1977 and 1979 the sisters Janet and Margaret Hodgson were purportedly at the centre of poltergeist activity that attracted newspaper and television scrutiny and was even dramatised in 2016 in the horror film **The Conjuring** as previously mentioned. It began with a telephone call to the local police station. Mum Peggy claimed to have seen furniture moving of its own accord and that two of her four children had heard knocking. Over the coming months and years various people investigated these events, some convinced that the moving objects and levitating girls were truly paranormal phenomena while others believed it all to be a fake. The girls, they insisted, were clearly trying to draw attention to themselves. Maybe, but my feminist head wonders if the same claim would have been made had the two people in question been teenage boys? You know by now that I do love a good soapbox to clamber onto and you might also have spotted that I'm quietly trying to teach you all some German while I'm at it...

Anyway, all in all, though, it would seem that young Janet was indeed up to some tricks, faking an old man's voice, bending spoons herself and generally having a laugh at the expense of gullible adults. Various reports were covered by the *Daily Mail* newspaper so perhaps there was a financial incentive behind keeping the whole thing going. What we can't say, however, is whether this applies to other poltergeist phenomena but there are things going on, yes indeed, in the mysterious realm of infrasound that only teenagers might be able to pick up on.

There is something known as the 'ghost frequency'. 18.98 Hz to be precise. Even if you were to turn the volume right up on a subwoofer <sup>21</sup> or whatever, if it's tuned into circa 19Hz you won't hear a thing. But you will sense it. This is a resonance that affects the movement of the human eyeball. It'll not only cause your eyes go wonky and maybe make you think you can see something out the corner of your eye, but also create a distinct feeling of unease and even fear. Back to Hollywood again and horror movies such as the musical score by Harry Manfredini for '**Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>**'. Infrasound was used on purpose to heighten the fear factor for the unwitting audiences and many others have done so since. Anything below 20Hz is labelled as infrasound, not perceptible to human hearing and, the lower the infrasound, the odder the experiences. 7Hz can disturb the heart and brain activity. Between 4 and 8Hz and you are in theta brainwave territory which is connected to intuition, daydreaming, meditation and prayer.

Vic Tandy became a lecturer in information technology at Coventry University. He and his colleagues, however, had bad vibes when working in their lab on more than one occasion. You know the sort of thing. Catching sight of something out the corner of your eye, something that vanishes when you turn to look at it for example. A keen amateur fencer, Vic one day noticed when cleaning his foil there that it vibrated even when clamped in a vice. Perplexed as to why this should be he looked into the situation and discovered that the air conditioning unit in the lab was emitting a very low frequency. When switched off, all eerie shenanigans stopped. With further experimentation into the 19Hz frequency in the 1980s came the realisation that infrasound had a significant role to play in how we perceive the world around us. He looked further still. On one occasion he investigated an apparently haunted fourteenth century cellar under Coventry's tourist

information centre. It was found to have a water fountain pump nearby that was focusing what became known as the 'ghost frequency' into the 'haunted' cellar area below. Invisible, inaudible waves were seeping through the buildings and the ground and into people's bodies, thereby creating a feeling of unease that they interpreted as a haunting. At least that was his assumption. What does this have to do with poltergeists I hear you cry? Well, it seems, once you get over 25 years of age you stop being able to hear anything below 15Hz but kids and teenagers can. This natural hearing loss is known as presbycusis. It has even led to new technologies such as *The Mosquito Alarm* which is used to deter loitering teenagers by emitting a sound only young people can hear. It was invented in 2005 and originally tested in Wales to stop youngsters hanging around a local grocery store. The device is now marketed worldwide but, ingenious as they are, youngsters have their own adaptation of the technology in the *Teen Buzz* ringtone which they can hear, but adults, teachers included, cannot. Cunning.

But back to the poltergeists and a new theory, as detailed in the *New Scientist*, by Pierro Brovotto and Vera Maxia. These scientists noted that the common thread between poltergeist stories from around the globe and through the ages is that central to them is often a pubescent girl. Puberty will, after all, modify the body, including and particularly the brain. They claim that fluctuations in electron activity can, in rare cases, create disturbances outside the body akin to those in the quantum world where particle and antiparticle appear together fleetingly and then annihilate one another. By so doing, the scientists claim, under very rare conditions, air pressure around the individual in question could move objects, sometimes heavy ones and at speed. I wouldn't claim to understand quantum physics but I do know it seems both weird and amazing in equal measure. Take quantum entanglement as an example. It seems that two electrons or protons can become 'entangled' as if they are one, even over vast distances. The way the quantum, micro world works and our macro world is, fundamentally, incompatible as far as we currently understand it. This in itself is a contradiction that scientists everywhere are trying to fathom. How can the very atoms that comprise us act in a fundamentally different way to how we do? How can subatomic, entangled particles be in two places at once when we cannot? Or can we? Is this an explanation for what people are seeing? The theory of everything to explain it all remains elusive but, rest assured, scientists are puzzling their heads over it and have been doing so for many years. Perhaps, on that happy day when one or other of them finally feels the penny drop, then other weird and wonderful things might also be explained. Suffice to say, if you're interested, the article '*Some conjectures about the mechanism of poltergeist phenomenon*' can be found in the February 2008 edition of *New Scientist*. Good luck.

So, maybe a combination of puberty coupled with the ability to hear some frequencies that adults can't might be the scientific explanation, rather than the surreal one, for poltergeist occurrences? Or maybe it's just a bunch of kids bugging about. Certainly the vast majority of poltergeist stories have been shown to be fake and, in general, a matter of teenage attention seeking. Who'd have thought. There always remain, however, a few unexplained events but none that I'm aware of in Nassington. If you can't find your keys, don't blame the teenagers in your life or their poltergeist pals. Blame your age. But, as I've touched on some weird science, I'll be staying with it for just a little, and intriguing, while longer...

### **'Where did you get that hat?'** <sup>22</sup>

Let me introduce you to the controversial subject of the God Helmet. There are various explanations given about how the mind can play tricks on you. What you think is the image of a cavalier standing at the end of your bed, or the person standing just out of vision as you walk by a room, is simply just a case of pareidolea some will insist. The brain, it seems, has a tendency to impose a meaningful interpretation on something we can't quite make out for sure. Take all those people who get overly excited when the toast flies out of the toaster and they convince themselves that Christ, for want of anything better to do in our crazy, war ridden, poverty stricken, crime riddled world, imprints his face on it. Or those who see a face on the moon left, obviously, by aliens who must have visited in the not so distant past. We've all done it, making out shapes in



cloud formations, tuning in for reports of oddly shaped vegetables on *That's Life* in the 1970s. Oh how we laughed. Not so funny though, when you wake at, of course, 3am and spot some cloaked figure in the corner of your room that has a striking resemblance to an axe murderer. You realise, usually, when he (or she, let's be even handed) hasn't lunged at you, that it's actually your dressing gown hanging on the door but, just for an instant...

And then there is brain stimulation. In the 1980s Stanley Koren and neuroscientist Michael Persinger developed a device to study creativity, religious experience and the effects of temporal lobe stimulation. Using an apparatus that came to be known as the *Koren Helmet* or *God Helmet*, the temporal lobes of subjects were stimulated with weak magnetic fields causing many of them to claim that they sensed a heavenly 'presence' in the room with them. Attempts were made to reproduce the findings in terms of hauntings also. Persinger in particular has become a well known personality in paranormal studies and his research was not restricted to this one area. UFOs too, alongside other paranormal experiences, he wrote off as changes to magnetic environments. The objectivity of his experiments came in for widespread criticism however. The mainly undergraduate test subjects perhaps knew what the experiments were looking for and gave, therefore, slanted accounts of what they had 'experienced'. Others, who tried to replicate the results in a more even-handed manner, failed to find similar results. The jury is, as they say, out.

Others have turned to drugs to see whether the brain's serotonin system is responsible for the various hallucinations people claim to have. Drug taking, after all, has been credited for want of a better word, with allowing people to unlock doors of consciousness for decades and the 1960s saw a wave of such 'experimentation'. Artists, writers, musicians, philosophers, all jumped on the bandwagon, not least Jim Morrison. Why do you think he named his band *The Doors* after all? LSD and mescaline were used by reputable scholars at Harvard University in drug related research and mystic experiences were indeed noted. There's nothing new under the Sun though, just a new phraseology to wrap it all up in. In the Americas tribes have been using mushrooms and cacti and goodness knows what for generations in an attempt to converse with their spirit guides during shamanic ceremonies. The Romantic poets of the nineteenth century in Europe used opium and laudanum to open their own 'inner eyes' in the search for artistic expression. They were not trying to commune with anyone who had 'gone before', Shakespeare for example, but rather conjure for themselves drug induced images that they could then use as the raw material for their work. Lord Byron, Percy Shelley and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were noted imbibers of such stimuli and the perils and pleasures of such a way of life were vividly recorded by Thomas de Quincey in '*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*' in 1821. Famously, Coleridge, after coming round from an opium-induced haze, began writing his poem '*Kubla Khan*' in 1797. He said later that he had perceived this potentially great work in its entirety and began committing it from memory to paper when he was rudely interrupted by a person from Porlock who had come to discuss business. An hour later, business done, he returned to his desk to continue his writing. The images had left him. Only fifty seven lines were ever written and the work was never completed. The 'man from Porlock' has since been immortalized as an example of an unwanted disruption to creativity.

Electricity pylons.

Now here's something else. My cousin Gill has a real fear of them and checks whenever she goes somewhere new to ensure that there are none too close for comfort. Medical researchers have studied the effects of electrical fields on the angular gyrus of the brain and discovered that electrical stimulation can cause both hallucinations and near-death experiences. Living under electricity cables or pylons, then, might increase your chances of seeing something paranormal. Others, of course, argue that the spirit world uses just exactly this sort of energy to commune with us. Same coin, different side being focused on. Oft quoted signs of ghostly activity are electrical equipment being turned on or off inexplicably. Alien visitors seem to like doing this too. Think of that scene in '**Close Encounters of the Third Kind**' when the little boy's toys all start up at once.

Spooky. Ghost hunters have been using Electromagnetic Field meters for quite some time to try and pinpoint where a spirit is most active and there are plenty of TV shows that will show you exactly how it's done. **Most Haunted** was first shown on British TV in 2002 and ran for twenty five series for example. Paranormal investigators suggest that ghosts are attracted to these very high electricity spots and drain the energy to use for themselves, explaining why equipment batteries run flat during investigations. You can buy an EMF meter for yourself. £15 - £115 on Amazon (other outlets are available) depending on how seriously you want to take the whole thing. But what, I here you cry, of other elements and forces?

Water for example.

So back we come to Nassington. More specifically our journey takes us to the former Congregational Chapel. Claire Blake and her family live there currently. She comes along to the Biscuit Tin meetings in the Village Hall on a Monday morning and always likes a good chat over a cuppa about the history odds and ends that we discuss there. A few months back she mentioned, after hearing me drone on, yet again, about ghosts and spooks and all that stuff, that she wondered if her own home might be haunted. She'd sensed stuff you see, and not just Clare, her friend Kelly too when invited over to dinner one evening. She noticed something in the area where the sitting-cum-dining room leads into the hall. How could I resist? So I started asking around a bit for stories about the place as various people over the years have either worked there or been inside for periods of time. It used to be, after all, a youth club in the 1960s and 70s as well as an outdoor pursuits centre later on. Now, Melanie Argent (née Gilder) is Barbara Gilder's daughter. Barbara came to the village as an evacuee during the war and I'll be telling you more of her story next year. Melanie and I had a very good catch up at Elsie's a few weeks back about various things but, during said chinwag, she mentioned that her mum used to work in the Congregational Hall and felt uneasy in one area. So strong was the feeling that she wouldn't linger there any longer than necessary. Hmm, interesting. To paraphrase yet again, Yoda this time, ask around a bit more I did. Paula Wright (née Offord) used to manage the youth club there, coincidentally, with Melanie's brother Philip. *'That place is haunted for sure'* I understood her to say while nipping in quickly to collect some photos she had for me. Hmm again. So off I go one lunchtime with a few others from the history group for a visit to Clare's home. Now, one of our number was the aforementioned friend with a feel for all things 'otherworldly'. She's had this awareness since childhood, as we now know from our visit to The Three Mill Bills, and mentioned recently that she struggles to understand why others don't accept something that, to her, has been evident for years and years. Hardly had we got into Clare's sitting room by the hallway than she visibly blanched. *'Something's wrong here'* she said, and had to move away. Obviously I mentioned this to Clare as that was why, after all, she'd invited us for lunch. Now, her hubbie Paul was at home too and later, not having heard the previous statement, commented that *'Clare often mentions noticing something odd when she comes down the stairs here'*. An odd smell. Watery, like river water. Well, blow me down. Dig about a bit and, yet again, you find articles about water and the paranormal. There's even been a book written about such spooky, watery, ghostly goings-on. **'Disturbing the Water'** by Peter Wise. All good, harmless fun.

Or is it?

There is a school of thought that regards water as a kind of conduit between us and the spirit world. Far back into the distant mists of time, ancient people revered rivers and lakes as liminal places between the world of the living and that of the dead and their Gods. They are places of transition in many cultures and have often been sites of worship. Vikings and Saxons took lakes and rivers very seriously. Go to *Flag Fen* and read all the information there and you'll see what I mean. Offerings were thrown in, usually things of value or significance. Swords for example. Vestiges of these beliefs are around us still but so much part of the everyday that we don't consider the origins. Throwing coins into fountains and wells for good luck. Baptism. King Arthur's sword *Excalibur* rising from the watery depths. Goodness, there are even water spirits in some mythologies, nymphs and nixies. Then, particularly in folklore from England's north, we

have Jenny Greenteeth, Peg Powler, Nelly Longarms and various Grindylows, who will pull the unsuspecting to their deaths in water. So watch your step. La Llorona we've already met. I've often wondered what might be lurking at the bottom of the Thames, or any river for that matter, stuck in the mud and the ooze for centuries. What might we find if we emptied them all out just for one day? Fascinating. Anyway, back to the theory. Studies have shown that bodies of water contain higher concentrations of electromagnetic fields (those pesky EMFs again) than surrounding land. Under a magnet there is a faint repulsion making water diamagnetic. Paramagnetism attracts, diamagnetism repels. And we are all aware that electricity and water are not a good mix. Water is a great conductor of electricity you see so, if you take the view that the spirit world exists and that it uses electricity to materialise, well, water might play a part. Now, with the Congregational Chapel this might be what is happening or, along with many other places in the village, including the property right next door, there just might simply be a well or a spring under the property that Clare can smell on occasion. It might create a cold spot. There is such a thing as water divining, or dowsing, after all. As a child, when we lived in Northfield Lane, I clearly remember that we had a water leak which couldn't be detected. Various efforts were made to locate the source, all failing, until a water diviner was called in. Well, there you go. Years later, when Anglian Water came to my home to install a water meter, I got into a discussion with the gentleman in question about this very thing. Expecting him to laugh it off I was surprised when he claimed, instead, that water authorities, Thames Water and Severn Trent Water in particular, do consult water diviners themselves when all else fails. Now, it seems that, when subjected to scientific testing, dowsing is found wanting. Psychologist Chris French, who we will meet later, stated in an article in *The Guardian* in 2013 that '*dowsing does not work when it is tested under properly controlled conditions that rule out the use of other cues to indicate target location*'. In other words, dowsers are aware of springs and wells and the like in an area and make intelligent guesses. Perhaps they do, who can say but, you can bet your bottom dollar that there's water flowing beneath our feet in Nassington somewhere hitherto unsuspected, so why beneath the Congregational Chapel?

And so we come to magnetism. I find it amazing. I remember as a child spending ages marvelling at the invisible force that drove two halves of a magnet away from each other or conversely attracted metal objects. So many invisible forces in the world that we know are there but simply cannot see. Take radios. Press a button and you can hear voices from all over the world, the TV is the same. Telephones. Satellites. All incredible. Precisely, and that's how it would have seemed to our visitor from 1624 who, by now, would have been hiding under the table to keep away from all this mind-bending magic. And then we have magnetic fields. These influence us too and, at night, due to the interaction of solar winds on the Earth's magnetosphere, the planet's magnetic field stretches out on the darkest side and becomes stronger. Some insist that this may be why ghost sightings happen at night. Given another four centuries what might we actually know about what is really going on all around us that we write off as fanciful pseudoscience or superstitious nonsense?

I wonder.

But a word of warning. You remember that brief chat I had with Paula? Well, I went back for a longer one and mentioned her comment about the Congregational Chapel being haunted. '*Oh no*', she said '*I was talking about the Manor House*'. In my enthusiasm for uncovering ghostly tales to relate to Clare I had inadvertently got the wrong end of the stick. Suggestibility it is called. In America, for example, 50% of the population believe that their house is haunted. Should you be told this and go and stay in such a property, you have been 'primed' and are more likely, statistically, to see something you interpret as supernatural. Obvious really, but had I not double checked then I would have worried Clare just that little bit more and unnecessarily. Ah, yes, but now you mention it, what about the Manor House then? A really old building. Must be haunted surely? Well, apart from Paula telling me that her dad, who had slept there when her mum had been the housekeeper years ago, thought it was, no-one else has mentioned it as having anything odd going on. Sure it's old. Sure it looks a bit creepy. If you were filming something for yet

another BBC Christmas ghost story in the village this is where you'd pick wouldn't you? It may look the part but, as far as I know, it is a ghost free zone.

Unless, of course, you know differently?

But what of the other old houses in the village I hear you cry, glory be, we boast the oldest one in Northamptonshire, surely that must be stuffed to the gunnels with ghosts of all shapes and sizes? Again, I must disappoint you, although not for the obvious reason. Prebendal Farm, you see, has been protected for centuries thanks to its apotropaic, or protective, marks both inside and outside the property rendering it 'spook proof' so to speak. These were kindly left there many, many years ago by a previous resident who was keen to safeguard the property from anything evil trying to slink and slither inside through a doorway, a window or down a chimney. Jane Baile showed me round her home a while ago and, sure enough, some superstitious former resident, or servant thereof, has scratched Marian marks into the stone to ward off spirits, witches or demons. During the medieval period in particular, Marian marks or 'Virgo Virginium' marks as they are also known, were pretty common both within churches or with places associated with Catholic worship, including domestic dwellings. In a nutshell, the M shape (representing the Virgin Mary) or VV shape (for Virgo Virginium meaning 'Virgin of Virgins'), sometimes one inverted over the other, were believed to protect you and your property from evil as too were specific prayers. Sometimes there were more letters taken from such prayers and engraved in a home or church, the example below giving you an idea of something found commonly:

A = Ave (Hail)  
VV = Virgo Virginium (Virgin of Virgins)  
M = Maria (Mary)  
R = Regina (Queen)

Now Prebendal Farm has the inverted M and VV. This 'guarantees' double the protection given that two symbols are being used but, as with so many other things in our tale, Henry's 'new' church tended to frown on such 'idolatry' and the practice fell out of favour. Prayers and anthems to Mary were common in the Catholic church you see, so etching something into your stonework once the Catholics had been relegated to the naughty step might not have reflected well on you now might it? Other similar marks, such as daisy wheel or hexafoil marks, have been found in numerous historic places, from medieval churches to barns, and some have even been spotted on furniture and travelling chests. These ritual markings were sometimes accompanied within a home by other objects - buried animals or personal objects perhaps - to ward off the unwanted. Sure enough, Jane assured me, children's shoes and other bits and bobs have been found over the years secreted about the place. On that visit to Southwick Hall a while back we noticed there too some protective symbols scratched into the crypt ceiling. In the case of the latter they are the commonest of such marks, the aforementioned daisy wheels. And to make doubly sure, at Prebendal Farm at least, some of the door locks inside have been turned upside down for good measure because, obviously, the Devil can't open such a lock.

Good to know.

There is one other property that I am highly suspicious of however but I am duty bound not to discuss in detail. I promised, you see, for fear of upsetting current residents. Suffice to say that, during four different conversations with four different people who spent time there over four different time periods, mention was made by them all of a 'presence'. None of them were prompted by me to bring the subject up and none of them could have known the other. Yet all of them claimed to have seen or felt something directly or to have had a sibling who did the same. And, most telling of all, the exact same spot inside the property was named in every case.

Weird or what?

## The Times They are a-Changin' <sup>23</sup>

Despite, by definition, being something of the past, ghosts do move with the times. At periods of severe social trauma and upheaval, for example, interest in and sightings of such phenomena go through the roof. Let us take the Fox Sisters of Rochester, New York, as an example.

Leah, Margareta and Catherine Fox enjoyed success as mediums for quite some time and have been credited with popularising the Spiritualist movement. They claimed to have been born in a haunted house where raps and odd noises were often heard and, when they moved, the noises seemed to move with them they insisted. A local Quaker couple was convinced by the girls 'apparent' ability to commune with the spirit world and word spread fast within their community. In 1849 the Fox sisters gave the first public demonstration of their abilities. Séances followed as too did popularity but, before long, experts in the field anxious to debunk these claims concluded, correctly as it turned out, that the 'rapping' sounds were produced by the girls cracking their knuckles and toe joints and tapping their feet against the wooden floors of the halls where they performed. Indeed, in the end, they admitted openly to their fraud but, nonetheless, Spiritualism had made inroads into a grief-stricken public consciousness made desperate by the American Civil War.

This conflict claimed the lives of approximately 620,000 soldiers and an untold number of civilian victims. The military deaths alone are more than those lost by America in both World Wars and the Vietnam War put together. Young men were dying in their thousands and the grief was immense. Enter Spiritualism. Here was a way to 'contact' your son, brother, father or loved one. People flocked to Spiritualist events in the hope of finding some kind of solace. In fairness, although the Fox sisters were frauds, who's to say that their 'conversations' with the dead might not have offered some comfort? Might not the entry fee have been worth a good night's sleep and a sense of reassurance that your dearly departed was at peace? The aim of the Spiritualist movement was to demonstrate that the soul is immortal and, crucially, contactable by the living. 'Proof' of an afterlife was, for a small entrance fee, offered at the séances and demonstrations and people flocked to attend. It was a movement, for the exact same reasons, that reached its height of popularity during the First World War.

In 1914 there were 145 Spiritualist societies affiliated to the Spiritualists National Union worldwide but by 1918 this had risen to 309. To circumvent the Witchcraft Act, demonstrations were promoted as simple entertainment but people knew precisely what was being offered. There you had the chance to talk, once more, with your 'boy', a hope clung to by very many including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, W. B. Yeats and, most famously, Rudyard Kipling.

His son John was his only child. Kipling used his influence to get a commission for his son despite the boy's poor eyesight so, when he perished during the Battle of Loos, the family's grief was immense and the father's guilt palpable. Not until 1992, thanks to an error detected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, was John's grave finally identified and the inscription changed from that of an unknown soldier to that of John Kipling. Like many others, Kipling hoped, no doubt, to speak to his son again to be told that he held no grudges about what had happened. Whether he did believe he had spoken to him beyond the grave is not known. What is, however, is the depth of his guilt. He would write:

*If any question why we died  
Tell them, because our fathers lied'*  
**RUDYARD KIPLING**

Unsurprisingly then, war causes an upsurge in the desire to contact the dead and an equal upsurge in those wishing to expose the conmen and women claiming to have an ability to do so. Harry Houdini <sup>24</sup> was one such who did his best to catch out the tricksters but, at the time, far greater was the need to say goodbye or seek forgiveness than it was to realise that you were being taken for a fool.

At the same time technology was also getting in on the act.

Photography as we understand it began with the Frenchman Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1822, the first photograph taken by him in 1826. Before too long, with the backdrop of war still hot to the touch, fraudsters began to 'capture' images of dead soldiers, most notably William H. Mumler. By accident one day he developed a photograph of himself that also inadvertently showed the blurry image of his cousin. An opportunity had presented itself. With so very many bereaved families seeking comfort he saw a way to cash in and, before too long, business was booming. His most famous photograph is that of Mary Todd Lincoln with her deceased husband Abraham Lincoln generally agreed now to be a fraud. In a nutshell, a photographic plate is opened more than once to expose the film multiple times to different images, thereby giving the impression of someone standing behind, or next to, the unwitting sitter. Other technologies followed. In 1844 along came the telegram, then the telephone in 1897, Thomas Edison's phonograph in 1877 and the radio in the 1890s. All of these newfangled gadgets would, in time, have ghost stories attached to them and, let's face it, we're doing the same today. Do you remember, back in the 1990s, a trial involving the heavy metal band **Judas Priest**? The parents of Ray Belknap and James Vance took them to court claiming that their sons had been encouraged to commit suicide by the subliminal messages hidden in the song '*Better by You, Better than Me*' that they had recorded in 1978. The lawsuit was eventually dismissed, having cost the band nonetheless \$250,000. Ray died instantly of the gunshot he inflicted upon himself and Ray three years later, having sustained serious and painful injuries. Then there is the film **Poltergeist** from 1982. Our young heroine, Carole Anne, sitting close up to the TV screen, is given messages by malevolent spirits through the TV static. '*They're here*' she says, and the rest is movie history. A series of films appeared along the same lines, '**White Noise**' the first in 2005 and the next in 2022. I could go on, trust me. Just go to the internet and take a look for yourself. Numerous, and I mean numerous, tales of smart phone glitches, weird text messages appearing from the other side, the list goes on and on and on and on. On BBC iPlayer you'll find a series of contemporary ghost stories with a comic edge. **The Haunting** looks at all those potential 'ghosts in the machine', bringing the whole business right up-to-date.

Like Fox Mulder, people want to believe you see and our new technologies, some insist, offer a new medium whereby the other side can get in touch. For decades claims have been investigated by Team Sceptic and Team Believer alike and as new technologies have developed, so they in turn have eventually been scrutinised. *The Ghost Club* was founded in 1862 with roots in Cambridge University going back to 1855. Past members include Charles Dickens, Siegfried Sassoon, Peter Cushing and ghost hunter extraordinaire Harry Price. It is still going, as a non-profit social club offering '*open-minded, curious individuals the opportunity to debate, explore and investigate unexplained phenomena*'. If you fancy something less chatty and more scientific then why not try the *Society for Psychological Research*? Founded in 1882, the SPR conducts scholarly research into '*experiences that challenge contemporary scientific models*'. For those with a more leisurely view of things you can subscribe to the *Fortean Times*, a monthly magazine devoted to '*anomalous phenomena*'. To paraphrase Elvis, if a little less conversation and a little more action is more your thing, you could go bonkers and buy yourself a ouija board and get it all straight from the ghost horse's mouth so to speak. The first talking board, yet again, was developed in that most traumatic of times, the late 1880s, and patented by businessman Elijah Bond in Chestertown, Maryland. It was a popular tool for contacting the dead used by those jolly old Spiritualists and, by many early on at least, regarded as a harmless parlour game. Here, though, I feel I need to add a serious word of warning.

The Catholic church has a very negative view of the whole ouija board affair, aligning it with Satanism. The scientific community write it off as an example of ideomotor response, a phrase coined by Benjamin Carpenter in, when else, 1852. Unconscious movement comes into play in this theory, conscious desires or emotions translated into muscular movements that move the

glass on the board that can be noticed by following the eye movements of those involved. In short, for Team Sceptic, the ouija board is a way of parting fools from their money.

Hmm. Language teacher hat on first. Ouija is a compound noun of the French and German for 'yes'. Over the years, and because, as you'll remember, mum regarded me as liking the 'weird' I've come across various people who've used a ouija board and lived to tell me the tale. It is central to the plot of '**The Exorcist**' previously mentioned too, and sets all manner of mayhem loose in that household. I've used one myself, way back in the late 1970s when I was at a party at a friend's house. Her older brother had a board you see, so, for 'fun' we got it out and sat around it and had a go. I can remember it as clear as if it was yesterday. Why? Because it was seriously frightening. Never, ever again would I touch one, let alone use one and, whether I too was a victim of a prank or subconscious muscular movements or whether I wanted it to work and am particularly suggestible I don't care. Not a good experience. I also used to own a set of rather attractive tarot cards. I wouldn't for a moment suggest that I have any gift for such things but it made for a bit of 'fun' too and, on occasion, I would guess correctly and amaze a friend. One Halloween a few years back '**The Exorcist**' was re-released so Kevin and I, after a little talk to myself about putting on big girl pants, went along to the cinema on the King's Road one Halloween to see it. Terrifying. I've watched it since and wonder why I reacted that way but I did. And the first thing I did when I got home was to throw out the tarot cards. Don't tempt Fate I reasoned. Better safe than sorry. Anyway, don't say I didn't warn you.

On a lighter note, as time moves on, so too does nomenclature. Ghosts move with the times you see and so their names need updating. Spiritualism became psychical research, became parapsychology became paranormal research. I recall a conversation at university with a chap who was studying Parapsychology as part of his Psychology degree at Goldsmiths College, University of London. A complimentary department, the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit led by the aforementioned Professor Chris French, was set up in 2000, years after this conversation, but interesting in its own right nonetheless. Here, they begin with the premise that paranormal experiences are scientifically explainable but this particular talk back in 1980 something or other was far from that. Damned interesting I remember thinking at the time, what a course that must be, but nothing to compare with Thomas Mann and Franz Kafka so I didn't transfer. What, I remember him asking, if ghosts are all around us and we simply don't really notice them? What if, as Cole suggests in '**The Sixth Sense**', they look like '*regular people*' and don't necessarily know that they are dead? What, he asked, if you're sitting on the tube opposite someone who isn't, actually, there at all? Constructing such transport networks as the London Underground necessitates cutting through any number of lost settlements, battlefields and burial grounds, so who knows what we might have disturbed? *Liverpool Street Station* is known as London's most haunted, built as it was through the site of an ancient plague pit. During excavations in the area for the CrossRail extension thirty new bodies were uncovered believed to have been victims of the 1665 Great Plague. Between 1569 and 1738 the western end of *Liverpool Street* was used as a burial ground called New Churchyard where, potentially, 30,000 were buried. Many there had come from the nearby Bethlehem Hospital for the mentally ill, otherwise known as Bedlam. You couldn't make it up, a whole movie script there for someone with a talent for such things. Creepsville Central. The only real question, though, would be why all these underground ghosts I've been sitting opposite for thirty odd years are all wearing modern clothes? I'll leave that one with you too.

Some very, very serious people, mind you, have taken the paranormal very, very seriously indeed, the worst of the bunch, arguably, being Adolf Hitler.

He and his minions, whether genuinely or for fear of getting into his bad books, believed some very odd things indeed, including those with a paranormal flavour. '**Raiders of the Lost Ark**' and '**Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade**' were not, as it turns out, all that wide of the mark. Indiana himself is thought to have been inspired by the German medievalist, ariosophist and SS officer Otto Wilhelm Rahn who really did search for the Holy Grail but without Steven Spielberg<sup>25</sup> to help

him. In 2018, Eric Kurlander wrote a book about it all, *Hitler's Monsters*. They say that truth is stranger than fiction and this is a case in point. Under Hitler's direction a branch of the Nazi Party known as the 'Ahnenerbe' were on the hunt for occult items that might give them supernatural powers and thus the upper hand against the Allied forces. They had a distinct preoccupation with pagan religions, magical relics, mystical grails and astrology and official Nazi groups travelled far and wide to investigate anything of interest. Many even gave the time of day to the 'Welteislehre' or World Ice Theory, Hitler declaring himself a supporter in 1942. He intended one day that it would replace Christianity and planned to build a planetarium in his hometown of Linz with a floor dedicated to the movement. According to his fellow countryman, the Austrian engineer Hans Hörbinger, ice was the basic substance of the entire cosmos. He had been granted this superior understanding in a vision in 1894 and went on to tour widely expounding his theories. It seems that a dead but waterlogged star (!) crashed into the Sun in the dim and distant and the ensuing impact caused water to be flung out into interstellar space. This in turn froze into huge blocks of ice and, on occasion, these crashed into the Earth. This was the reason for, he insisted, both The Flood which Noah had to negotiate and the disappearance of Atlantis. Our current moon is actually the sixth as the previous five have crashed into us. During one such crash fragments of alien life were deposited which developed, you guessed it, into the mythical Aryan race, traces of which the Nazis were on the hunt for. Of course this 'science' was the antithesis of the 'Jewish' physics of Albert Einstein and the like, so very appealing to the Nazi movement. World Ice theorists were known to have claimed that, just as it needed an amateur Austrian scientist to cleanse the world of 'Jewish science', so too *'the Führer' has proved how much a so-called amateur can be superior to self-styled professionals. It needed another amateur to give us a complete understanding of the universe'*.

Sound familiar?

The movement rejected the 'fatally weak' Judeo-Christian notions of mercy, love and justice, thereby wilfully misinterpreting Nietzsche<sup>26</sup> in the process. The 'Aryan' race that Hitler was so fond of spouting on about were, they said, the descendants of Atlantis<sup>27</sup>. Werewolves not only existed but acted as bouncers against Slavic vampire attacks<sup>28</sup>. This whole craziness seems to have begun when a young Hitler was given a copy of a magazine written by Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels that expounded many odd ideas about the 'Aryan' nemesis, the 'Tschandals'. According to Lanz, these 'Tschandals' were bent on interrupting and preventing '*higher knowledge and creativity fuelled by the superior racial soul of 'heroic Aryans'*'. Jesus, Buddha, Osiris and Moses were all lumped together as examples of how pure-blooded Aryans could be. Hitler also read Ernst Schertel's book '*Magic*', underlining 'useful' passages such as '*He who does not carry demonic seeds with him will never give birth to a new world*'. He didn't dream all his prejudicial nonsense up by himself you see, it all began a long time before, making him a glorified plagiarist with an axe to grind.

Wowsa. Bet you didn't think we'd get here from **Hamlet** now did you?

And not just the Nazis, no indeed, how about the US Stargate Project founded in 1977 by the U.S. Army? Their brief was to investigate the potential for psychic phenomena in military and domestic intelligence applications. Various sister projects were eventually consolidated under one umbrella organisation in 1991 and so 'Stargate' was born. The film and subsequent TV series were not a total thing of fiction after all then, and how many similar films and stories have a military unit moving in to 'deal with' something otherworldly? '**E.T. the Extraterrestrial**'. '**Avatar**'. '**Paul**'. As for the Stargate Project their concern was with 'remote' phenomena and how to influence, 'see' events or gather information from afar. The group consisted of less than twenty individuals and it was declassified in 1995 as nothing useful was ever gleaned from it all they claimed but they tried. Maybe, though, just maybe, on some secret base somewhere in the world, government agencies continue to poke about in the realm of the 'weird' and the 'fantastic'. Of course they do. Only today I read an article concerning a scientific experiment to send a quantum particle back in time.

Now won't that open up a real can of worms.



## The Truth is Out There <sup>29</sup>

So, there you have it. This has been, of course, the mere tip of the iceberg but I hope I've given you some food for thought along the way. From the Middle Ages and long before recorded history, right up to today, 'ghosts' have always 'existed'. They may come from our imaginations or appear from time to time from some weird, parallel, quantum ridden, infrasound influenced, magnetic-and-electric-field-emitting kinda place that we just don't fully understand. Yet. The only thing that has changed is how we try to explain them and what we call them. For Charles Dickens they were moral compasses, for Hollywood film directors they have been money spinners and, for many of you reading this, they are something you have your own experiences of and theories about. Maybe all ghosts are is a reflection of the time we happen to live in, the technology that is enjoyed at this point in history and the current thinking about the world, the universe and the afterlife. All human civilizations are aware of death so maybe it's just human nature dreaming up 'proof' of an afterlife? As time has gone by moves have been made to outwit death altogether. Cryogenics <sup>30</sup> for one. Goodness, there are even holograms of the dead these days. Elvis is 'alive and well' and touring in November this year with his *Elvis Evolution* spectacular. Tupac Shakur (ask your grandchildren) died in 1996 but performed in 2012 alongside Snoop Dogg at the *Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival*. Peter Cushing appeared in a recent Star Wars movie. Bob Monkhouse came back from the grave in 2007 to front an anti-smoking campaign after dying of lung cancer himself in 2003. If you're feeling left out, or even inspired, why not get in on the act yourself and create your own avatar with *Hereafter.ai*? You can make recordings for people to chat with when you, in time, step behind that proverbial veil yourself. Might be worth it, just in case you have something to impart and can't work out from the other side how to materialise at the end of a bed. It would seem, therefore, that what began with creepy stories told by ancient peoples around a campfire has transformed into the actual creation of the ghosts we will become ourselves. Over to William Shatner again.

Weird of what?

If you remain Team Sceptic, blame it on what you will – migraines, dodgy plumbing, earthquakes, quantum shenanigans or hallucinations as you wake. Or just living too near to an electricity pylon. There are millions of well-educated, respectable and sensible people worldwide, and far more than you might imagine, who are firmly in the Team Believer camp. They will knowingly shake their heads. They may give you a wry smile. They may even tell you why you are mistaken and what they have experienced that defies explanation. And then there are those like me who are Team I Want to Believe. One thing is for sure though. We may not live long enough to know if aliens visit us or whether time travel becomes a reality but we will, every last one of us, discover what awaits us after death.

The last word, as so often was the case in life, goes to my mum. As a little girl, just after my gran Elsie Black died in 1974, I must have been worried that she might appear at the end of my bed to terrify me out of my wits. "*Why ever would she?*" I remember mum saying, '*If she wouldn't hurt you when she was alive, why on earth would she after she'd died?*'

Why indeed.

Karen Palenski 2024

### Notes

1. **The X-Files** – this is an American TV series that ran from September 1993 to May 2022, although a reboot is on the cards. In all there were ten series with 208 episodes in total which covered a wide range of supernatural topics, from vampires and demons to monsters and aliens of various kinds. The two protagonists both worked for the FBI, Team Believer represented by Fox Mulder, and Team Sceptic led by Dr Dana Scully. Throughout their adventures it is Fox, in the main, who is witness to the veracity and existence

of the unusual things they investigate, but, as the series continued, Dana Scully was also party to events she could not, scientifically, explain.

2. **Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?** – beginning in 1969 the original series ran for three seasons. Four friends, Fred Jones Daphne Blake, Velma Dinkley and Shaggy Rogers, along with their talking dog Scoobert Doo solve mysteries involving supposedly supernatural creatures. Invariably, however, the crime has a human explanation and the villain, once caught, usually grumbles '*if it hadn't been for you pesky kids....*' Their favourite means of travel is in their brightly coloured van called 'The Mystery Machine'. The series spawned live action movies and various updates and was voted the fifth best cartoon series of all time by TV Guide.
3. **The Ghosts of Motley Hall** – this British TV series was broadcast on the ITV network from 1976 – 79. It relates the adventures of five ghosts who haunt Motley Hall and it starred, amongst others, Arthur English, Freddie Jones and Peter Sallis. Each ghost is from a different era and unable to leave the confines of the Hall and its grounds. It inspired the BBC series 'Ghosts' which has a similar format.
4. **Barrack Yard** – this area of Nassington was located on what is now the green area next to the church and Poppy Cottage. It had been home to many village families and the yard in the middle had a well in it to supply the houses. Eventually they were condemned as unfit for human habitation but photographs do still exist.
5. **The Nightmare** – a painting of 1781 by Swiss artist John Henry Fuseli that shows, simultaneously, a sleeping woman and the contents of her dream. The incubus sits on her chest and the horse's head reflects the folklore idea of the 'mare' that rides on your chest as you dream. The painting became so popular that Fuseli produced at least three other versions.
6. **EVIL** – an American supernatural drama that began in September 2019. Three specialists, a priest, a forensic psychologist and a sceptical technology contractor, investigate possible supernatural incidents on behalf of the Catholic church. Their cases always have a religious element to them and, as time goes by, their lives and families become ever more affected by the world of both the angelic and demonic. The lead female character Kristen Bouchard, for example, is plagued by night terrors in the form of George, a demon who taunts and terrifies her. Is he a mere figment of her imagination however? There have been four seasons in total so far.
7. **Like quills upon the fretful porcupine** – Act 1, Scene 5. Hamlet is confronted with what seems to be the ghost of his father who insists that he has been murdered and that he wants to be avenged. The tale he could tell would be, he insists, a frightful one:

'I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part  
And each particular hair to stand on end.  
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine'

8. **Upstart Crowe** – in 1592 the writer and critic Robert Greene accused the writer William Shakespeare of getting above his station in life and plagiarising the work of others. As a popular dramatist himself he was known for making negative comments about his contemporaries. He died very young at just 34 and a posthumous pamphlet attributed to him, 'Greene's Groats-Worth of Witte, bought with a million of Repentance', makes reference to an actor who thinks he can write as well as a university educated man;

'For there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers...and being an absolute  
Johannes fac totum, is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a country'

9. **Warts and all** – in 1653 the painter Samuel Cooper was asked to paint a portrait of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland. The sitter insisted that he not be flattered and be painted with pimples, warts and everything. Over time the phrase has been shortened to 'warts and all', meaning to accept someone as they are, faults and all.
10. **The Others** – set in the 1940s in a secluded house, Nicole Kidman stars as Grace Stewart' a mother of two children, Anne and Nicholas, both of whom suffer from a sensitivity to light. As a consequence all windows are covered making the house perpetually dark. She, and they, begin to hear inexplicable noises and Anne claims to have seen an old woman and a young boy named Victor. A housekeeper, grounds man and mute housemaid appear looking for work and it is they, in the end, who tell Grace that they are all, she and her children included, the actual ghosts. Grace had killed them and then murdered herself. What they are experiencing is a séance, where the living are trying to make contact with them.
11. **Ghost** – Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore star in this love story-cum-ghost story. When Sam Wheat is murdered he enlists the help of a medium Oda Mae Brown, played by Whoopi Goldberg, to contact his girlfriend Molly Jensen, to both protect her from the same assailant and to right the wrong done to him. In 2023 Channing Tatum announced that he planned to do a remake with himself in the lead role.
12. **Ghostbusters** – in this 1984 supernatural comedy, four 'ghostbusters' set up a business in New York to help rid the city of spirits. The film stars Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Sigourney Weaver and Rick Moranis. It has been praised for its blend of comedy, action and horror and has become a cultural phenomenon.
13. **Danny Robins** – An award winning writer and broadcaster, Danny Robins has found recent success in particular with his BBC Radio 4 series 'Uncanny'. Although he began life as a stand-up comedian and writer,

his interest in the supernatural led him to researching eerie stories. In 2022 his play '2:22 A Ghost Story' won Best New Play in the WhatsOnStage Awards. 'Uncanny' has had a BBC1 TV show too with a second series about to be broadcast.

14. **I hope this is as close to hell as I ever get** – allegedly, when called in to investigate the paranormal activities of the house in Amityville, Lorraine Warren, a paranormal investigator along with her husband Ed, said 'I hope this is as close to hell as I ever get' when investigating the upstairs sewing room. She claimed to be both a clairvoyant and medium while Ed was a self-taught demonologist. Many of the cases that they investigated have been turned into films and TV series, including The Conjuring series.
15. **Unholy Trinity of Films** – Rosemary's Baby, 1968 is important as it breached the old Hollywood Hays Code law that restricted representations of sex and violence. Not only is it a horror film, though, but also an analysis of patriarchy and the restrictions placed on women in the 1960s –the horror is born of social fears and restrictions placed on women. 'The Exorcist' of 1973, made in the same year as the Roe v Wade abortion case, is a discussion of a woman's right to control her own body. Many films of the time explored anxieties around pregnancy and the agency of young girls and here we also see an echo of the trauma inflicted on the heroine by the separation and divorce of her parents. 'The Omen' meanwhile, is more of a straight horror movie although the placing of a child at the centre of the action with parents unable to defend themselves against him, was unusual at the time.
16. **Ghoulies and ghosties and long legged beasties** – this is taken from part of a prayer attributed to the Scottish poet Robert Burns (1759-96). In full it goes:

*'From ghoulies and ghosties, and long-leggedy beasties,  
And things that go bump in the night,  
Good Lord deliver us'*

17. **There are more things on heaven and earth** – Take from Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5, Hamlet is exhorting his sceptical friend Horatio to believe the evidence of his eyes, for he too has seen the ghost of Hamlet's dead father:

*'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,  
Than dreamt of in your philosophy'*

18. **EVP monitors** – Electronic Voice Phenomenon monitors purport to capture the sound of ghosts. The idea was popularized in the 1970s by Konstantins Raudive, a Latvian psychologist, who claimed that he had captured very short messages on over 100,000 occasions. One school of thought suggests that ordinary voice recording equipment also picks up such messages too but at extremely low volume, hence our inability to notice them.
19. **Weird of What?** – a Canadian TV series hosted by the actor William Shatner. Each episode sees three investigations linked by themes which are always bizarre or supernatural. Ghost, alien and monster related topics have been featured and experts have tried to explain, through science or the paranormal, what has been happening. At the end of each programme Shatner, famously, utters 'Weird or what?'
20. **I hear you knocking...** – part of a lyric from 'I hear you Knocking' by Dave Edmunds, released in 1971.
21. **Subwoofer** – a subwoofer is another word for a speaker that is dedicated to reproducing the throbbing, low-frequency, bass-heavy beat felt physically through dance music or movie soundtracks.
22. **Where did you get that hat?** - part of a lyric from the comic song of the same name, 'Where did you get that hat?' was first performed by Joseph J Sullivan in 1888.
23. **The Times, They are a-Changin'** – the title of a 1964 song by Bob Dylan. It has been covered by numerous artists, including Simon and Garfunkel, The Beach Boys, Billy Joel and Bruce Springsteen and ranked 59<sup>th</sup> in Rolling Stone magazine's list of the five hundred greatest songs of all time.
24. **Harry Houdini** – Erik Weisz, known by his stage name Harry Houdini, was an American-Hungarian escape artist, illusionist and stunt performer. In the 1920s, at the height of his fame, he turned his attention to debunking psychics and mediums, believing that they were taking advantage of the bereaved. His magical training gave him an insight into how the trickery was being performed and he offered a cash prize to anyone who could successfully prove their supernatural abilities. No one managed to do so and the prize was never claimed. He and his wife agreed that, if it were possible to communicate after death then they would do so using a secret code. For ten years, on Halloween night, his wife held a séance to try and contact him but after ten years she gave up saying 'Ten years is long enough to wait for any man'. To this day, however, magicians around the world honour the tradition and try to reach Harry Houdini on Halloween night.
25. **Steven Spielberg** – Two of the series of Indiana Jones filmed made by Steven Spielberg involve our hero battling with the forces of evil in the form of Nazi relic hunters. In 'Raiders of the Lost Ark' in 1981 the search is on for the Ark of the Covenant which houses the tablets upon which God's Ten Commandments were written. It is supposed to hold great supernatural power and so the Nazis want to take it to their leader. When activated the wrath of God is unleashed complete with blazing fire and blinding light that has the power to part the sea and kill anyone standing in its path. In 'Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade' of 1989, Indiana and his father are on the hunt for the Holy Grail. This too has supernatural qualities in that it can restore health and gives immortality.

26. **Nietzsche** – Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was a nineteenth century German philosopher. In his 1883 work ‚Also sprach Zarathustra‘ he described his concept of the Superman – some, he claimed, were simply born with a superiority that in itself gave them the right to determine their own way through life free from the shackles of conventional morality if they so chose. Morality, he believed, was a purely man-made concept and, as such, open to personal interpretation by those who knew better. His views, as was so often the case, were hijacked by the Nazi movement in an attempt to add credibility to their own worldview.
27. **Atlantis** - the Greek philosopher Plato mentioned the mythical island of Atlantis in two of his works. He presented this naval empire in the Atlantic Ocean as an ideal state and, despite its minor role in his writings, it became an example of a utopian state throughout the coming centuries. Some, however, have believed it to have truly existed and many have debated about Plato’s inspiration for his island.
28. **Vampire attacks** – there is a clear division in folklore between Western Europe, where tales of witches and witchcraft were common, and that of Eastern Europe, where vampires were believed in. On both sides people were hunted and killed, often with government sanction, witches burned at the stake and vampires having the stake driven through them. As a consequence, in Western literature, the vampire is often used as a metaphor for an Eastern way of life regarded as threatening.
29. **The Truth is Out There** – in the TV series ‘The X-Files’, Fox Mulder famously has a poster with the slogan The Truth is Out There on his office wall in the depths of the FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC. It is also, usually, the final frame of the title sequence of the show. For Mulder, who lost his younger sister Samantha to an alien abduction in the 1970s, the belief is that, if he can prove that one ‘spooky’ tale is true ie. a vampire, a ghost, a mythical being, then all of them might well be too and he would be one step nearer to rescuing her. And does he? You’ll have to watch the series to find out, no spoilers here.
30. **Cryogenics** – there are those that believe that, if you are frozen immediately after death, in time, and when medical science has advanced enough, you will one day be curable of whatever killed you and subsequently be resurrected to be healed. Various people have been frozen in this way, at great expense, and one, Walt Disney himself, has allegedly been put under the fairytale castle in Disneyland. Sorry, not so. It wasn’t until two weeks after his death on December 15<sup>th</sup> 1966 that the first two people were cryogenically frozen.

## Contributors.

With grateful thanks to the following for sharing their knowledge and recollections with me, both past and present, or for their contributions in written form

Rachelle Mould	Jane Baile	Stuart Fenn	Kim Paramanis
Angela Gibson	Sarah Chapman	Paula Wright	Fran Palenski
Annie Scott	Olive Jensen	Melanie Argent	Toni Palenski
Ben Homan	Andrea Barraclough	Clare Blake	Jayne Marshall
Jane Homan	Michelle Wate	Lesley Fletcher	Jovie Milenkovich
Daniel Wate	Caroline Lawson	Clare Marshall	Paul Blake
Jo Cooper	Steve Russell	Graham Marshall	John Miller
Jean Palenski	Alec Jackson	Hugh Sutton	Christine Simmons
Roger Newton	Carol Newton	Valerie Hunter	Paul Blake

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