

# INTRODUCTION

## GHOSTOLOGY



### *What is a Ghost?*

That infernal question that all who are engaged in psychical research and specifically spontaneous cases of apparitions and hauntings have been striving to answer for hundreds, if not thousands of years. Some may say that serious science really only took an interest in trying to answer the question in 1882 following the formation of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Before then the question wasn't asked, as society generally accepted ghosts and spirits as part of their (unseen) world or was only occasionally considered by philosophers and men of religion. This notion is untrue, for as long as mankind has existed ghosts have been part of our shared human experience and there have always been those who would seek to try and understand such experiences. Of course there are many who already claim to know what ghosts are. Spiritualists inform us that they are the trapped souls of the deceased unable or unwilling to move on to the higher planes of existence. Parapsychologists offer the opinion that ghosts represent nothing more than hallucinations or some other unkind trick of the mind. There are countless paranormal investigation teams, throughout the USA, Britain, and further afield. Many of these amateur investigators have developed their own theories and notions about the nature of ghosts and how they manifest, theories they derive from their investigations or television ghost hunting shows and from sharing their ideas and evidence via social media and the internet.

## *Ghosts Exist*

Every day people experience ghosts. They see ghosts, they hear ghosts, and, they interact with ghosts. There are many definitions of what ghosts represent and most of the definitions make assumptions that are based upon general notions or sometimes the beliefs of the person writing the definition.

According to the Oxford dictionary a ghost is: “An apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image”. But there are plenty of examples in which apparitions of living people have appeared and plenty more in which the apparition is far from nebulous. Parapsychology considers the study of ghosts to be related to aspects of survival beyond death but there is little to indicate ghosts are visions of the returning dead. They may equally well be hallucinations, anomalies of time and space, or something else entirely. In 2002, parapsychologist Ian Baker<sup>1</sup> offered the definition of a ghost as being: “A sensory experience in which there appears to be present a person or animal (deceased or living) who is in fact out of the sensory range of the experient...” But people have witnessed ghosts of vehicles and described smells of burning timber, and oil, and by what mechanism can a person have a sensory experience that is in fact outside of their sensory range?

In truth, all these definitions show that when it comes to the experience of ghosts we are usually either just guessing or imposing our own beliefs and ideas onto the question. Whenever we talk or write about ghosts, are we actually considering the same phenomena? The flitting shape seen out of the corner of our eyes, the solid appearance of an armour clad Roman soldier, translucent figures that walk noisily or glide silently across floors only to disappear through solid walls; all are described as ghosts. The word ‘ghost’ may therefore best be considered to be a generic expression; an all-encompassing term to describe

<sup>1</sup> Baker, I. S. (2002). Do Ghosts Exist? A Summary of Parapsychological Research into Apparitional Experiences. In J. Newton (Ed.). *Early Modern Ghosts*. Durham, UK: University of Durham.

some sensation or sensory experience that we are unable to explain by normal means.

In the hunt for ghosts many different methods have been employed. Good old-fashioned séance techniques and other methods drawn from Spiritualism still prevail. Ouija boards and dowsing with pendulum, crystal, or rods continue to be popular tools of the ghost investigator. Modern technology has allowed us to peer into the darkest cellar and the spookiest hiding place of ghosts using infrared and thermal imaging. The electromagnetic spectrum is routinely scanned for the energy used or manipulated by ghosts and spirits using a variety of meters; whilst the voices of the dead are listened for intently using modified radios and audio recorders. All so far (sadly) to no avail. Despite claims to the contrary by numerous investigators, we still lack that most crucial item of equipment - the ghost detector! But, that is hardly surprising when one considers that it would be impossible to create a device that has the ability to detect or measure something we know virtually nothing about. It is a truth, perhaps not universally acclaimed, that after so many centuries of study by countless investigators and amounting to millions of man-hours of research we still do not have an answer to the question, *what is a ghost?* But should that mean we should cease searching? No, of course not.

## ***Ghostology***

People continue to see ghosts and ghosts continue to be a fascinating aspect of our humanity and one that deserves to be studied. Such phenomena are generally described as being spontaneous i.e., they are unplanned, unexpected, or unsolicited. Ghosts and their associated phenomena and experiences represent a unique subject for investigation and study. Ghost investigation is often confused with Spiritualism (which is in reality a religion), mediumship, or the survival of bodily death. Ghost investigating is also frequently confused with parapsychology, which is the academic study of psychological or mental phenomena that are generally ignored by orthodox psychology. Ghost investigating certainly takes account of both spiritism and parapsychology but it out of necessity it also draws upon the sciences, engineering, and humanitarian disciplines too. In reality, ghost investigation is an area of research that is distinct and separate. Those who investigate

ghosts are required to conduct much of their research in conditions that lack many of the formal experimental controls that science usually demands. Ghosts do not appear on demand in the laboratory, they cannot be predicted. Ghosts are reported in busy modern shopping precincts, derelict and ancient castles, in fact, ghosts are reported by night and by day under almost every imaginable circumstance. Such situations do not lend themselves to the rigours of scientific control, yet the ghost investigator must be able to work through the chaos in order to obtain useful and usable information. Ghost investigators have to take account of the need to record and document unusual and unexpected human experiences and they may have to document and examine the history and geography of a location. They are required to obtain and record objective measurements of environmental changes and they have to be able to conduct their research under conditions that most others would consider to be chaotic and un-conducive to accepted methods or techniques.

The study of ghosts, or *Ghostology*, is not trying to capture apparitions on camera, although that is sometimes a part of it. It is not trying to record the sounds and the voices of the deceased or of spirits, although that too is a part of it. Ghostology is the holistic study of a fascinating aspect of our humanity, a shared human experience that dates back to the earliest civilisations and is common to all of them.

**GHOSTOLOGY The Art of the Ghost Hunter**

**Published November, 2015**

**White Crow Books**

**[www.whitecrowbooks.com](http://www.whitecrowbooks.com)**

**Paperback ISBN 978-1-910121-72-6 (£12.99)**

**eBook ISBN 978-1-910121-73-3 (TBC)**

**Available on Amazon (plus to order in most good book stores)**