

THE GHOSTS OF COPT HILL

ENJOY THIS STORY ON A COLD OCTOBER EVENING WITH A SLICE OF WARM PUMPKIN PIE AND HOT CUP OF COCOA AND REMEMBER, THE RUSTLE OUTSIDE IS ONLY THE LEAVES BLOWING ON THE AUTUMN WIND!

THE COPT HILL INN, located on the Seaham Road opposite the site of the Seven Sisters Neolithic barrow excavation, is said to be haunted by the tormented spirit of a former landlord who had hung himself in the public bar. Over the years his ghost has been seen by several regulars who all claim that the departed barman re-enacts his own grisly death.

On October 12th 2002, the then pub landlord very kindly allowed me to spend one cold October night in the bar of the pub to investigate the claims.

Two video cameras and two stills cameras recorded the entire night, collecting hours of footage and images. Several experiments were carried out throughout the night in my attempt to prove the existence of a ghost.

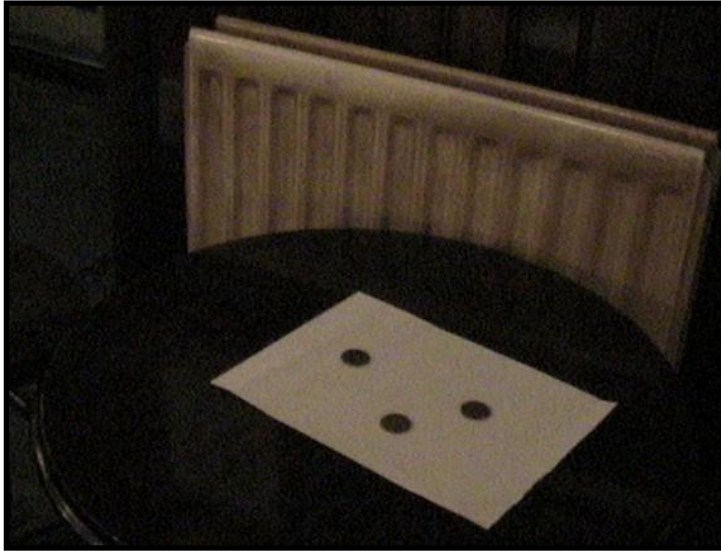


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UPDATED: 03/04/2013



One test involved filming old coins that had been placed on white paper and drawn around, to see if they had been moved, whilst another test attempted to record voices from beyond the grave with the use of a Dictaphone and the asking of relevant questions. Disappointingly, both of these tests proved negative, however my night in the pub proved to be anything but uneventful.

Throughout the night I experienced a mixture of emotions and body temperatures, ranging from warm and calm to cold and uneasy. At nineteen minutes past midnight, I was chatting away to a fellow ghosthunter when suddenly the main internal door into the bar swung open and slammed immediately shut!

The noticeable sound of the slamming door of course made us jump and we can offer no explanation for the incident.

One of the spookiest happenings, which made my heart miss a beat, the skin on my head tightened and my hair stand on end, was when I saw a ghostly orb rotating around and around. However, on closer inspection, the orb, which I thought was the first stage of a manifestation, turned out to be a speck of dust floating on a warm air current above one of the pub's lamps!



Towards the end of the overnight vigil I experienced feelings of paralysis and extreme coldness and I estimated that we couldn't open my eyes for a period of fifteen minutes. Was this tiredness, a paranormal event or just sheer terror?



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More recently, Martin Hutton, who supplies meat to the restaurant at the Copt Hill Inn, was in the pub alone with the current owner, Lord Trevor R Davis, on June 7th 2011 when they both heard a very low resonance “hello”! Could that have been the departed landlord making his presence felt?

It seems that the Copt Hill area – and not just the old pub - is renowned for paranormal happenings. One local lady told me the following story:

"A few years back, probably about 12 years ago [1990], I had a strange encounter in the Copt Hill area. Every weekend my son and I went to stay with my aunt at Doxford Park and my Dad used to drive us there on a Friday teatime. At night he picked my son and me up as usual and we began the journey from Easington Lane to Doxford Park.

My Dad used to chat away, catching up on news as we drove along the usual route, through Hetton, up Gillas Lane, past the golf club, turning left past the Seven Sisters, and on through Warden Law. My Dad was chatting away as usual and as we approached the Copt Hill pub I saw a man riding a bike on the road in the direction of Seaham. As we approached him my Dad seemed not to notice him and didn't pull over to give the man extra room. I remember shutting my eyes as we passed him, waiting for the impact of a crash yet it didn't happen!

Heart pounding, I immediately looked in the mirror and saw him peddling away. My Dad was still chatting away and after composing myself, didn't think of it again.

The following Friday we did the journey again. As we passed the Copt Hill pub, I couldn't believe my eyes, like déjà vu, there was the same man in the same place, peddling away in the direction of Seaham. I took no chances and told my talkative Dad to pull over, which he did with a puzzled look.

The Friday after, we did the journey again. It was an awful night, cold and raining. My Dad had two speeds, slow and stop, and in the rain he went 20 miles an hour. As we passed the Copt Hill there was the cyclist, in the same spot, peddling away, wrapped up for the weather with his hood up. We approached him at a slow pace. As we approached him, the event seemed to pass in slow motion and I realised that my Dad wasn't going to pull over and give him room - we were heading straight for him!



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THE COPT HILL INN ON SEAHAM ROAD

At that point I panicked and clearly remember shouting hysterically: "Dad, pull over you're going to hit him!" Dad didn't pull over; he just studied the road ahead and said, "Hit who?" At that point it was too late to do anything, we had caught up with him and as we passed him, with an inch of space between him and the car, I looked at him ... he turned his head and I saw that he had no face, there was nothing in the hood - it was just empty!

I heard my Dad's voice in the distance saying, "There's no one else on the road". I shuddered and realised that I had seen an apparition - my Dad hadn't pulled over because he hadn't been able to see him! We did that journey every Friday for a couple of more years. I never saw him again and I didn't tell anyone about it for about two years. To this day, when I pass that spot I always think of that unnerving encounter."

Similar accounts to this tale but involving a ghostly hitchhiker on the stretch of the A690 which passes up through Houghton Cut, as well as UFO sightings in this area, suggest that you can never be too careful when out driving at night in haunted Houghton-le-Spring!

Paul Lanagan

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The original version of this article was published in Sign Post magazine in October 2003 and later as Haunted Houghton: Heritage Map Vol II in 2004.
- Text from this article was also used, but not referenced, in "Haunted Sunderland by Rupert Matthews" ISBN: 9780752446639.
- Thanks are extended to Martin Hutton for sharing his spooky experience in the Copt Hill pub and to the unknown lady who, many years ago, shared the story of the ghostly cyclist (if she is reading this, please get in touch).

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