

ghostly goings on!



Skipton resident Malcom Hanson shares a few of his ghostly experiences in Yorkshire.

It's not very often that, within moments of entering a reputedly haunted building something unexplainable happens, but in the case of Verdes delicatessen - which sits on the corner of Swadford Street and Coach Street, Skipton - something did! Ah... said Jan Moss, joint-proprietor along with husband Paul Cole, I was going to tell you about that...

Having just walked into the building and taken a seat in the caf area, a door leading to the upper floors had immediately burst open, seemingly of its own accord, startling both of us. It happens regularly, though it has been a bit quiet recently - maybe it's because you have come to investigate, whispered Jan wryly.

Actually, Paul caught the full wrath of the door when he was decorating just after we had moved in. Not only did it bang open then, all the chairs fell off the tables and the paintings fell off the walls. At the same time something pushed past him and, seemingly kicking open the fire door, dashed out into the street.

I was visiting the premises following a request from Jan. All I knew was the building had been erected well over 100 years ago by one of the town's most eminent Victorian citizens, Mr Baldisorro Porri, and as for its ghosts, it was a new one for me.

The first thing was to put Jan's mind at rest by explaining a census carried out in 2002 for my book: A Skipton Anthology had brought to light a somewhat astonishing revelation: in Skipton almost one building in every three has something flitting about it - day and night. The Mosses were not alone - even my own house is haunted.

So what else happens in this quaint corner building, I wanted to know?

Pots of jam move along the deli counter; menus somehow gather together on the tables; coffee machines work by themselves - that sort of thing, answered Jan. Probably the most unnerving thing was when several people heard my name being called in the caf area. A customer said he had distinctly heard the voice emanating from the table right next to his - but the table was empty; no-one was seated there!

A tour of the basement included peering through a hole in a wall into the darkness of a recently discovered recess close by where boxes of tarts had flown off the shelves. The spookiest place for me however, seemed to be the stairs leading to the upper floors - maybe it was just me remembering that whatever kicks open the door must travel down them, but they had me developing goose bumps!

I left Jan promising to keep an eye on the place, and also offering to start this year's Halloween ghost walks from there.

A couple of years ago I created a ghost walk for Settle and in so doing attracted the attentions of several shop proprietors who

invited me to investigate their premises. One shop, close by the Shambles, had a multiple haunting: people had their hair tugged; a black cat had been seen on the stairs; footsteps had been heard on the upper floors etc - all the hallmarks of a classic haunting.

On the night I visited however, I felt the whole building to be really harmonious: that whatever haunted the building did so only because it was happy there. The upper floors were warm and welcoming and I got the distinct impression a large family, consisting mainly of sisters, had lived there. This proved to be the case.

I sat where the black cat had been seen on the stairs and felt nothing; so too the small kitchen area where people had had their hair tugged. However, I was not to leave disappointed by a no-show. In fact, what occurred just prior to leaving had me in stitches. I was stood with the proprietor and a friend at the bottom of the stairs, when I suddenly received the distinct impression that we had at that very moment been joined by a rather mischievous spirit. Just as I was mentioning this, I was surprised to find my behind being pinched!

In Keighley stands a house soon to be bulldozed. This building has had a very dark reputation: I understand in the past several suicides - and at least one murder - have



taken place within its walls. The things that haunt this place are legion.

However, though frightening they may be, there is one wraith within this miasma of lost souls that produces smiles, warmth and feelings of love towards it from all who encounter it, as a past occupier recently explained to me.

My friends and I, who are students, moved into the house for a short period two years ago. We had already been told the place was haunted and, by way of welcome to the house we should all expect to see a little Victorian girl materialise within the 24 hours of occupation.

On our first day, as I was unpacking in my bedroom, I suddenly sensed a change of atmosphere. I turned around and there, framed in the doorway, was the most



beautiful little girl I had ever seen.

She smiled at me and then the strangest thing happened: though she did not speak I heard her voice in my mind saying: You can see me, can't you? With that the girl vanished, though she later appeared to my friends, in turn - just as we had been told.

Careful checking of census records by a fellow psychic researcher revealed that the house had been built in 1881 by the then mill owner, who at that time was living there with his wife and one-year-old daughter. In 1891 the census reported that now only his wife and he were living there - the daughter had recently died. Her name was Fanny Slingsby.

Fanny has dwelt in the house for the past 117 years, greeting everyone who has ever lived there with the same smile and welcome. She is happy in her world where, at night-time, when the offices are closed, she mischievously plays havoc with the staple gun - and woe betides anyone who leaves important papers lying around; Fanny will hide them in the most inappropriate of places.

Before the house comes down, I intend to gain permission to spend 24 hours there. I want to be the last person to meet this friendly little ghost, and if Fanny should appear to me, I will tell her that I can see her too, but I will also call her by her name - the first person to have done so for more than a century - and I will attempt to explain, as gently as possible, that it is time for her to leave and go on to another place where her loved ones are waiting - and when she is ready, we will leave together.

Malcolm Hanson will be conducting his annual early evening Skipton Halloween Ghost Walks for children and families (6.00pm) and late night Skipton Halloween Horror Walks for adults (9.00pm) on Tuesday 30th and Wednesday 31st of October and Thursday 1st of November. Full details of prices and booking by phoning Malcolm on 01756 709275

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