Haunted Houses In Britain: The History And Atmosphere Of The Ancient Ram Inn, Chillingham Castle, And The Borley Rectory

There are many opinions on what happens in the afterlife; some that believe that people stay if they have unfinished business. Paranormal events are purported phenomena described in popular culture, folk, and other non-scientific bodies of knowledge, whose existence within these contexts is described as beyond normal experience or scientific explanation. To haunt means to visit habitually or appear to frequently as a spirit or ghost, or to recur persistently to the consciousness of; remain with,to visit frequently; go to often. The history and chilling atmosphere of The Ancient Ram Inn, Chillingham Castle, and the Borley Rectory prove to be some of the most haunted buildings in Britain.

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One of the earliest structures, The Ancient Ram Inn is located in Gloucestershire, England and is said to be one of the most haunted houses in England. As Stephanie Weber says in her article,“Yet there's a dark side to all of that history. The Ancient Ram Inn is reportedly home to a shocking number of ghosts that refuse to check out. Guests have been so scared by their encounters with the other side, that they have even jumped out of windows to escape the terror.” The inn is around 900 years old and is apparently the home to many ghosts that terrorize the guests.

One eyewitness, John Humphries, the past owner of the Ancient Ram Inn, stated that he had “discovered the skeletal remains of children just under the staircase”(The Ancient). The inn has a very dark and murderous past. People are terrified of the place and most people won't set foot on the property the inn sits on because of the experiences people have had.“Paranormal researchers have described a history of murders on the premises – the burning of a resident witch, a former innkeeper’s daughter hung in the attic, the bones of ritually murdered children buried under the floor”(The Bohemian). In addition, the Rt Rev John Yates, former Bishop of Gloucester, is said to have called the Ancient Ram, “the most evil place I have ever had the misfortune to visit,” following a failed attempt at exorcism (The Bohemian). Even amongst supernatural investigators, the place has an unprecedented reputation. It lies on the crossing point of two ley lines, one of which runs direct from Stonehenge; other researchers have claimed the inn sits upon an ancient pagan burial ground. Locals will cross over the street, we’re told, rather than walk past the Ancient Ram at night”(“The Ancient”). These chilling statements keep most people away from the inn, especially locals who have heard stories about the inn while living in Gloucestershire.

One of the most malevolent spirits of The Ancient Ram Inn is a witch who was murdered for her practice in witchcraft. She died after taking shelter in a room located in the inn. The evidence is as follows, “One popular legend surrounding the Ancient Ram Inn is that of the witch burned at the stake. She was burned at the stake in the 1500s. It was the prosecution of people who did not believe and practice Christianity as sanctioned by the government” (The Ancient). A lot of people believe that the woman’s spirit still haunts one of the rooms of the house to this day. It is believed that the woman took refuge in one of the rooms of the house before she was captured and killed. Today, that room is called “The Witch’s Room” (“The Ancient Ram”).

There are other ghosts that haunt the Ancient Ram Inn besides the witch. These include a Roman Commander, a little girl, a cavalier, and a high priestess. They have been seen and communicated with many times by paranormal teams and investigators. The evidence is as follows:

“There are a lot of other ghosts including a Roman Centurion seen by a plumber working on site, and a young girl who was murdered here by one of the inn’s more sinister former residents. The little girl was supposedly the innkeeper’s daughter and she was found hanging in the attic. There's also the apparition of a cavalier. The High Priestess is a particularly scary sight. A few people have reported to be awoken by the sound of a woman chanting, and then look at the bottom of their beds and see a woman in white religious robes, looking down on them, arms raised in the air and chanting in some strange language. If that’s not bad enough there is also a succubus, which is a kind of demon with a strange hobby of pinning people the beds at night and attacking them” (“The Dark History”) There are possibly more spirits than the ones who have been investigated, but these are the ones who are reported to be the most malevolent.

Consequently, few people are brave enough to actually step foot in the Ancient Ram Inn to investigate these paranormal activities. Kieron Butler from the UK Paranormal Study went into the inn with his team and made contact with many different spirits that haunt the inn. As he states in his article, “We immediately gained contact with a spirit feeding us false information and warnings of death etc etc. I seemed to just know it was Edward the main dominant spirit there and accused him of wasting our time, we know who he is and to step aside to let other spirits get through. What happened next should be a warning to anyone using the Ouija board! We asked for a sign outside the board and we heard a deep kind of groan or yell. I felt him at first right behind me, we continued then I felt him stand in the spot I was sitting, I felt overcome by a feeling I cannot explain but I think he was trying to get into me as if I could be used as a channel” (Butler). Some spirits are known to be demonic and will do everything in their power to take over someone’s spiritual strength.

Another one of England’s most haunted castles is Chillingham Castle. Chillingham occupied a strategic position during Northumberland’s bloody border feuds. Chillingham Castle was often under attack and often basked in the patronage of Royal visitors, a tradition that remains to this day. Sir Henry Wakefield was Treasurer of England to King Edward IV and, in the last century, Sir Humphry’s father, Sir Edward Wakefield, was both Treasurer and Comptroller of the Queen’s Household. In 1245, King Henry III came to Chillingham as did the Kings Edward I and James I. Charles I stayed here for three frantic nights shortly before he was imprisoned. Edward VIII came to hunt here, and members of today’s Royal family continue the tradition with private visits to the castle this century(History). There were many cases of torture that happened there and the castle also sat on the border between feuding nations. Though there are plenty of dark

aspects to Chillingham Castle's history, few compare to its history of torture. It is rumored that Chillingham Castle had the worst torturer to ever work within England. This sadistic man, known as John Sage, literally killed thousands of unfortunate souls in the worst possible ways within Chillingham and its surrounding grounds. Some believe that it is the malevolent, dark presence which has been known to cause harm to visitors, whilst others believe that particular presence to be something even darker. ("Chillingham Castle Ghosts"). Chillingham Castle has a very dark and depressing past and is home to many spirits.

Many people died in the Chillingham Castle due to being tortured and murdered by a man named John Sage. "Before he was a torturer he was one of King Edward's best men in the battlefield, and had worked his way up to the rank of Lieutenant. Sage was injured one day whilst at battle, his leg was wounded and he couldn't fight anymore. Sage begged Long shanks to keep him on in some capacity and he was given the role of castle torturer. Sage was a brutal man, he hated the Scots and he revelled in the role, even devising some devices of his own"(Super User). Around 8,000 people fell victim to Sage in the 3 years that he tortured and murdered people. The evidence is as follows, "There is a boiling pot, gadgets for gouging eyes out, barrels full of spikes that would have had a prisoner tied in and rolled around until the flesh was ripped from the body and they died in agony, there are cages that would have been attached to a prisoners stomach and a starved rat would be put inside and the only way out for the rat was to eat his way out through the victim! Some of the things the prisoners would have endured at the hands of this man are unimaginable. Sage tortured upwards of 50 people a week for the three years he held down this job. There are many torture devices on show. The guide tells us he never comes down here on his own as he has felt a malevolent presence here on more than one occasion As the war was coming to an end with the Scots, John Sage wanted rid of the Scottish prisoners being held in the castle so he rounded up the men, women and older children took them to the courtyard and put them all onto a huge bonfire. The younger children were kept in the Edward room and could probably see their parents being burned alive, they will have heard the screams and will have been able to smell the burning flesh"(Super User). Cries and screams of pain are commonly heard, as well as the popping and snapping of joints, bones and ligaments thought to be from those being stretched out on the infamous torture device, the rack (Chillingham Castle). Some people believe that the spirits still haunt the castle because they have unfinished business.

There are several ghosts who haunt Chillingham Castle, but the one that is discussed the most is a little boy who haunted a certain room in the house before his soul was put to rest. As Ron Lyons states in his article, "Several ghosts are known to wander the castle's timeworn interior" (Great Castles).The most famous is that of the 'Radiant Boy', a childish wraith that is seen in the castle's Pink Room, and whose heart rendering cries of either fear or pain echo through the corridors upon the stroke of midnight. In the past, cries always seemed to emanate from a spot near where a passage is cut through the 10-feet thick wall into the adjoining tower. As they faded away, a bright halo of light would appear, and the figure of a young boy, dressed in blue, would approach those sleeping in the room (Great Castles). Additionally, the bones of a child, surrounded by decaying fragments of blue cloth, were found behind the wall. They were given a Christian burial, and thereafter the 'Radiant Boy' was seen no more – until, that is, Sir Humphrey began letting the room. Some guests complain of a blue flash that shoots out of the wall in the dead of night. Although they attribute it to an electrical fault, Sir Humphrey is quick to point out that there is no electrical wiring in that particular section of the wall" (Great Castles). There is no doubt the boy still haunts the castle due to dying a terrible death.

Visitors who have toured Chillingham have had their experiences with the spirits who haunt the castle, especially spirits who have physical contact with them. The evidence is as follows, “Visitors to Chillingham Castle have reported having their hair pulled, arms scratched, and even being bitten by unseen jaws in the darkness”(Chillingham). The spirits who act so violently aren’t afraid to show themselves and are known to be somewhat malevolent as the evidence states, and are very physical.

The most recent building of this compelling list includes The Borley Rectory which was built by Reverend Henry D. E. Bull near the river Stour, Essex in England in 1863. The building is named most haunted and has a dark and depressing background. The rectory burnt down in 1939 due to “mysterious circumstances”(Super User). Many people thought the rectory was haunted beforehand due to the history of the building. It's thought that the rectory was destined to be a haunted house from the start due to the events that had occurred on the site many centuries before.The foundation was an age old Priory on land that contained a 12th century Church, Caretaker's House and other buildings. A.C. Henning, the rector in 1936, discovered that the Doomsday Book told of a Borley Manor prior to 1066, so he concluded a wooden church was probably also built around that time. The foundations contained underground tunnels and a complex of vault rooms. The Rectory had 20 rooms and was 3 stories high” (Super User).

The Rectory was a Victorian building built in southern England and was well known for its paranormal phenomena. As Melvin Willin states in his article, Until the rectory was destroyed in 1939 due to a fire, it was known for the claims of hauntings and poltergeists. The claims were put into books and articles by a known investigator named Harry Price (Borley Rectory). Investigations and claims were recorded so that future investigators could possibly add to the information given.

The Borley Rectory had two main ghosts that haunted the grounds before it burnt down. Which was a nun and a monk whose love story ended tragically. Basically, the nun and the monk had an affair, and they both paid for it once everyone started discovering it. The nun was bricked up in a wall alive, while the monk was beheaded. “One of the earliest sighting and perhaps most famous us that of a nun. Which may seem strange given that there used to be a monastery on the site, one would expect a monk rather than a nun. According to local folklore, a nun from a nearby nunnery fell in love with a monk from the monastery, and the pair attempted to elope together. They were found and sentenced to death”(Borley Rectory).

In addition, residents of the Rectory came forward with their terrifying experiences. “A servant of the Bulls, Mrs E. Byford, claimed to have heard footsteps when no other living person was there. On the afternoon of July 28, 1900, four of the Bull sisters witnessed a spectral nun in the garden. Later appearances of the nun were witnessed by a number of people including Edward Cooper, the rectory gardener; Fred Cartwright, a local carpenter; a village girl and a reporter. An apparition of Harry Bull and other deceased individuals were said to have been seen on several occasions” (Willin). The hauntings increased during the incumbency of the Smiths in 1928. They didn’t know of the rectory’s past, but experienced incidents such as the servants’ bells ringing on their own, shadowy figures and whispering. “In October 1930, the Foyster family moved into the rectory. Phenomena of a poltergeist-like nature immediately started to occur, growing in intensity between 1931 and 1932” (Willin). The Foyster family has had experiences such as hearing footsteps, whispers, bells, and knocks. They also smelt scents of perfume, incense stones, bottles, soaps and other objects. They heard the locking and unlocking of doors

and opening of windows. Marianne Foyster was also thrown from her bed.

Hauntings have taken place in many buildings in England. Many of the spirits that haunt the buildings cause physical and mental harm on the visitors and/or residents that visit and live in the haunted places. “But I do believe in the paranormal, that there are things our brains just can't understand” --Art Bell. The history and chilling atmosphere of The Ancient Ram Inn, Chillingham Castle, and the Borley Rectory prove to be some of the most haunted buildings in Britain. Perhaps there will be more hauntings throughout the years of these establishments.

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