



THE PARISH CHURCH, CIRCA 1905

FACES FROM THE OTHER SIDE

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!

ACRE FOR ACRE, Houghton-le-Spring is thought to be the most haunted place on Wearside and if the stories are true, another of the most haunted buildings in Houghton must be the ancient Parish Church of St Michael & All Angels, which is thought to date from Saxon times. In February 2008, when the Church interior was modernised, the doors were thrown open to allow the public to have a glimpse at the secrets revealed during the archaeological works during the installation of new underfloor heating.

Hundreds flocked for a glimpse at the ancient finds of coins, old doorways, skulls and bones and other antiquities. However, one parishioner got a glimpse of more than she bargained for.



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Dairy Lane resident Mrs Williamson, whose name has been changed at her request, was taking photographs alongside me on her traditional stills camera. The poor lighting inside the church was causing havoc with my own shots and I made comment about this, and promptly deleted the blurred snaps from my camera's memory card, which was approaching full capacity.

A few days later Mrs Williamson gave me a call, mindful that we were clicking away alongside each other and of the comments about my blurred shots, she explained what she had captured on her own recently-developed photographs - orbs, and dozens of them!

Many believe that orbs, or light anomalies, are the first stage of a spirit manifestation. Were the ghosts amongst us on that day? Mrs Williamson explained that if you looked closely you could see a number of faces in the spherical orbs. Were the spirits of former parishioners making their presence felt, or was it simply the camera's flash reflecting off the dusty air?

On November 2nd 2002 I thought I had spotted my first ever ghost within the grounds of the ancient Church. I was standing at the bus stop opposite in the Broadway, with my



CHARNEL REMAINS INSIDE ST MICHAEL & ALL ANGELS CHURCH, 2008



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fellow ghost hunter Peter Corfield, having just been for a walk up at the Hillside Cemetery at dusk. As we stood there waiting for our bus I glanced across to the churchyard and was taken aback to see what looked like a stereotypical ghost hovering next to the Vestry door. The churchyard had been in use for hundreds of years, with 1581 being the earliest date on a headstone, until its closure in 1853 when it was deemed full to the brim following a cholera outbreak. The Vestry itself was built on top of the graves of Rev Henry Gillow and his mother. Henry had been Rector of Houghton in 1470 until his death in 1483.

Surely we were seeing things. How ironic that on our return from an uneventful late night walk at the Old Cemetery that I should spot a ghost down at the Church. Around 2004, I spotted the same ghost, again lurking outside the Vestry door. After closer inspection, it turned out to be hot air escaping from a vent!

So no ghost this time - but there are far too many stories about haunted Houghton-le-Spring for all of these phenomena to be explained with logic.

Paul Lanagan

PAUL LANAGAN BA HONS
LOCAL HISTORIAN
H-L-S HERITAGE SOCIETY



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- Thanks go to Mrs Williamson, whose name has been changed at her request, for sharing her story. Mrs Williamson also showed us photographs of a spooky occurrence at Dairy Lane, where her late mother had been captured on a family photograph – long after she had passed away!

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