



SPIRITS AT THE ROBBIE BURNS PUB

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, the Robbie Burns public house on Newbottle Street must be one of the most haunted places in the area. Indeed, adverts for the pub in 2000 proclaimed: "The Most Haunted Pub in Houghton'.

Although much older, records for the Robbie Burns pub date back to 1851 when John Ray was landlord. He had moved to Houghton after one of his sons had run away to sea, while his elder son had left home on account of disagreements with their stepmother. Being the closest drinking hole to Houghton's theatres, which were located opposite, the Robbie Burns was often awash with players, performers and musicians once the curtains had gone down. The building undoubtedly would have soaked up some of that theatrical atmosphere, a core ingredient of hauntings!

In the 1980s unexplainable activity was well reported in the local press, which featured stories of poltergeist activity and four ghosts. One ghost was that of an old woman wearing black who was seen to melt into the wall. Several customers and a member of staff saw the silhouette of a man move through the pub; and the apparition of a young,



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fair haired child, wearing Victorian style clothing has also been seen. The fourth and perhaps most interesting ghost is that of Thomas Caldwell. Thomas was allegedly killed in the cellar of the Robbie Burns in 1876. After a delivery of beer, he was found in the cellar with his head crushed underneath a beer barrel – he was barely alive! It was only when the barrel was moved by well-meaning rescuers that the air rushed into his brain cavity and he died. Electrical disturbances, strange noises and slamming doors on the premises are attributed to Thomas's tormented spirit.

Bearing this in mind, in 2002 the incumbent landlady told me that her pet Rottweiler had never given any indications that it could sense anything beyond the scope of the human senses ... but you just never know!

Paul Lanagan

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



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UPDATED: 03/04/2013

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was featured in the Houghton & Seaham Star newspaper of Wednesday October 31st 2012. The Robbie Burns' 2000 advert was in the Houghton Feast 2000 programme of events.

If you know anything about the ghosts of the Robbie Burns pub, please get in touch.

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