



Each edition of Boundless tries to cover a subject that all other press is particularly uncomfortable, or biased, to report seriously. We want to give you something truly edgy, which you cannot read elsewhere, with the hope that it will challenge any previous stereotypes. In the last edition we covered the dark web. In this one it is...

GHOSTS

"The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science."

Albert Einstein

Investigation by Steve Jackley

I sat in a dark room listening to something respond to the questions of a paranormal investigation team. A shadow seemed to grow in the corner of the room as the 'voice' – or whatever it was – grew louder. It was then, for the second time, that a thought crossed my mind: could ghosts be real?

Science and technology define our world, creating an illusion that we have all the answers. But do we really? For all the super-computers, we still cannot accurately predict the weather next week. For all the advances in medicine and psychology, the functioning of the human brain remains obscure. We can look further and further into space, and yet we can still only guess at how life began. How much about ourselves, and the world around us, do we really know?

So many times throughout history, the beliefs of our ancestors have been found to contain some element of truth. One of the most persistent and prevalent beliefs is that of a spirit realm, where entities (both malevolent and benevolent) exist alongside us. From the Shamanic tribes of Amazonia to the Arabic cultures of the Middle East; from Europe to Asia - this belief can be found expressed in different ways. Yet, for the most part, the idea of ghosts is dismissed by modern science and indeed by the majority of educated people. Despite all the stories and continuing use in popular culture, it is said that there is no concrete evidence of such things. Moreover, a number of investigations have shown how paranormal phenomenon can be attributed to insignificant natural causes, frauds, or simple tricks of the mind.

Yet there have been occasions where no explanation could be provided. Those may be few, and the evidence subject to debate, but they remain as a tantalising suggestion of the unknown. Many respected scientists, from Carl Jung to

Wolfgang Pauli, did work in this field, raising far more questions than answers. All highlighted one thing in common - that the mind, developed over millions of years, may be aware of things that our scientific instruments are not. There may be subtle factors and connections that science is still to identify.

Against this background, I joined the Avon Paranormal Team as they investigated an allegedly haunted location: Arnos Manor Hotel in Bristol. The hotel has a rich and varied history, being originally built as a mansion in 1755 by William Reeve. A leading figure in the then Merchant Venturers, Reeve also erected a 'black castle' from the waste material ('slag') of his copper works. He eventually became bankrupt twenty years later and the estate was divided. The original mansion, now Arnos Manor Hotel, was made into a Catholic Convent in 1850, before seeing a brief interlude as a gambling venue in the 60s and 70s. In 1941, whilst clearing the wreckage of a Nazi bomb raid, workmen uncovered a human skeleton that was believed to be that of a nun. The story was that she fell pregnant and, in her shame, committed suicide.

The green light of the desk-top EMF detector suddenly rocketed up to dark green and amber, before falling back down again.

I entered the hotel with three members of the Avon Paranormal Team ('APT'): Damien, Jon and Ellie. It was a grand building, with an ornate staircase that led up to the second floor. Here was room 160 - our temporary 'base' for the night. There was nothing discernibly 'spooky' about the room, although after a few seconds of being there I felt a slight 'pressure' on my chest that I attributed to the warm temperature.

Casually joking, the team began to remove equipment that might have been taken from a scene of 'Ghost Busters'. Digital cameras, dictaphones, temperature readers, microphones, 'EMF' detectors (devices that detect electromagnetic fields) and even motion sensors were amongst what they used. But there were no crystals, 'dowsing rods' or spiritual mediums! APT were founded in 2005 by a group of local people who had a balanced measure of interest and scepticism in alleged 'paranormal' activity. Damien, who works in Bristol as a carpenter, had been one of the founders. "I had an experience when younger", he explains, "and ever since then have had an interest in the paranormal. I think you're missing out if you're not open

*mind*ed." The other two, Ellie and Jon, were more sceptical. "There's been a few times when I couldn't explain something, Jon noted, but it can probably be put down to a natural cause." The team used a number of techniques in their investigations and had recorded some 'phenomenon', mostly related to 'orbs'*1 and 'EVPs'*2

APT had visited the hotel in 2010 after hearing stories of unexplained activity in different locations, including Room 160. "On that occasion we picked up some interesting readings," Damien, leader of the team, said. "But nothing concrete." As the team went about setting up their equipment, I began to read through the historical material. Most of it related to the hotel's past as a convent, then a gambling venue, but scattered amongst this were some accounts that stood out. In 2004 a guest had abandoned Room 160, taking his duvet to sleep in the chapel downstairs, after saying that he had felt like someone was sitting on his chest and feeling the bed move. A housekeeper reported many occasions when the bath taps were found running and the windows shut by themselves. One chambermaid apparently quit her job after entering the room. But such accounts were vague and could certainly be attributed to mundane natural causes.

It was around 10pm when the team, spread around the room, turned the lights out. Myself and Ellie held EMF detectors, with a third one being placed on the desk in the centre of the room. Damien had also set up a camera in one corner. I lay on the right side of the large double bed as Damien announced that the microphone was being switched on. He began a 'calling out', whereby any 'presence' or 'spirit' was invited to come forth and make contact. Despite my scepticism there was a distinct 'atmosphere' in the room. Then, when Jon repeated the requests for 'contact', something happened. The green light of the desk-top EMF detector suddenly rocketed up to dark green and amber, before falling back down again. Silence. I will confess that my heartbeat went up a notch or two then.

After a few seconds, Jon repeated the request. And again, exactly on cue, the EMF detector reacted to something. It continued like that for a while, with Damien and Jon making open requests for activity, but nothing further happened. The only difference was that Ellie made a protracted cough, which was followed by a personal sensation of discomfort. There were a few minor variations in our hand-held detectors, and the feeling of a bug landing on my forearm, but nothing else. A few minutes later, Damien turned the lights back on.



Damien, Jon and Ellie



Arnos Manor Hotel

Notes:

*1 Orbs: These are generally a spherical balls of light or bright colours that can be captured on digital cameras in the presence of dust or other small particles of matter. However, some appear when there is no apparent dust or other matter present.

*2 EVPs (short for 'electronic voice phenomenon'): The 'staple' of any paranormal investigation, these are recordings of sounds that are not discernable to the human ear. Often attributed to our tendency to make patterns from randomness (i.e. interference), some EVPs seem clear and distinct - sometimes making whole words or even sentences.

The team was enthusiastic about the EMF reaction, but immediately wanted to rule out any natural causes. Damien had already done a sweep of the room, looking for sources of electromagnetic fields, but none had previously been around the desk. "What about phones?" Ellie asked. Normally the team switched off all their mobile phones, but Jon had accidentally left his on. Since he was sitting closest to the desk, it meant that the EMF readings could have been from when his phone was picking up data. However, attempts to duplicate a similar reaction failed: the detector only lit up when Jon's phone was placed and used in relative proximity to it. Previously, the reactions had occurred when he had been sitting at a distance. As for the timing of the reactions – made just after the spirit had been asked to make contact and approach the green light – we all agreed that it was strikingly coincidental.

"There's been times I have felt like the dark got darker, like there were loads of people crowded around you. Its something I have never felt before."

Damien then took out what he called a spirit box – a device that scans through all radio frequencies at high speed to avoid picking up words. The lights were turned off and a series of questions were asked. Amidst the devices staccato fuzz of random noise, there were sudden peaks that came across as words. 'Who are you?', 'are you happy?' and 'can you say my name?' were the questions that seemed to elicit the strongest reactions. However, I was more inclined to believe this to be consequential interference or a psychological trick than actual responses. Nevertheless, in the darkness, there was a sensation of someone else being there – especially in one corner of the room. Other questions resulted in little or no clear differences in sound; the same as when no questions were asked at all. Moreover, the room seemed somehow less oppressive, with the slight pressure I had felt earlier completely disappearing.

With the lights back on, I took the opportunity to ask the team about anything that stood out on previous investigations. "We recorded one very clear EVP once," Damien said, "of what sounded like a child saying hello. There was no one else in the room, and no children nearby, but the EVP was so clear. Another time, we caught two very strange breaths, which other people also heard." It didn't seem very much to go on, so I asked Ellie – the team's strongest sceptic – if she had experienced anything.



"There's been times I have felt like the dark got darker," she replied. "Like there were loads of people crowded around you. Its something I have never felt before."

We proceeded downstairs to where the nun's skeleton had been found. Apart from being dark and cold, I did not sense anything unusual. Nor did any of the EMF detectors react, including after Damien and Jon did a calling out. Only when ascending the hotel stairs were a few electromagnetic variations detected, but these were minor and could probably be attributed to faulty wiring. We continued exploring different areas of the hotel, pausing here and there, but there was nothing as striking as what happened when first entering Room 160.

I came away from Arnos Manor Hotel with my reporter's scepticism still firmly intact... yet with more questions than answers.

Editorial note: A few days before going to print, Damien came into the Arkbound office. He had something to show us. Amidst the hours of camera footage and digital sound recordings, there was an orb of intermittent flashing light that drifted above the bed of Room 160, corresponding

to when our reporter had felt particularly uneasy (a still image from this footage is shown above). As the light drifted to the left side of the room, pausing and moving at different speeds, the EMF detector reacted. Unexplained natural phenomenon or 'ghost'? We will leave you to decide.



About APT

Avon Paranormal Team are a not-for-profit group that seek to investigate reports of paranormal activity, where possible finding scientific explanations. Listed with Bristol City Council, APT prioritise confidentiality, professionalism and courtesy when conducting their investigations.

To find out more, visit:
www.avonparanormalteam.co.uk

