

HAUNTS AND OTHER LOCALIZED ITERATIVE PHENOMENA

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As all of us are aware, not all haunts are of the same type. Some are much better established than others. The best established case that has come my way is that of a seventeenth century house nearby which has been the center of unexplained phenomena for a long time. I have collected independent accounts from many of those occupying or visiting the house over the last fifty years.

This case and others like it point to the need for the establishment of detailed files on individual haunts—files that will preserve the salient facts attested by individuals from time to time, without publication of details. For it is obvious that, if too detailed publicity is given, then later reports may be attributed to knowledge of the experiences of earlier tenants rather than to independent observations.

My own experience is that it is generally useless for investigators to stay for a short time in a haunted house. For thorough investigation longer residence is generally required. Various case histories that record a succession of independent experiences are enlightening. If we study them chronologically, changes in the nature of the haunt may be noticed which are themselves worthy of research and analysis.

One never knows from what quarter reports of value may come. Many come to hand as a result of conversations at the dinner table. The difficulty is to follow them up, as many people are unwilling to commit themselves in writing.

It is generally simpler to write up the account that you have received and to get the informant to amend and then sign the account. Talks to small informed societies will often bring up cases from some of those present, cases that repay further investigation. Radio broadcast talks will bring in an occasional good case among a whole lot of rubbish.

Generally only one sense at a time is affected by hallucinations though I have known one case where three senses were hallucinated: my informant saw a robed figure walk across his bedroom and stop at the foot of his bed, heard her footsteps and felt a touch as she bent over the foot of the bed. Oral hallucinations are the least trustworthy as they can so often be explained by unrecognized echoes of normal sounds. Hallucinations on waking from sleep are generally suspect, but a case like the following is hard to explain as due to normal causes: A doctor, walking down the corridor between the wards of a hospital on his way from his consulting room to give a lecture to medical students, met a nurse whom he had seen coming out of one of the wards: as he was taking off his hat to her, she just vanished. I have a feeling based largely on the cases that I have investigated that certain races—the Celts, the Gaels and the Scandinavians in particular—are more likely to have these unexplained experiences than the more stolid Anglo-Saxons.

Our main requirement at present is to secure accurate accounts of the phenomena of haunts, but not to publish them until it is clear that the haunt has ceased (or the building involved has been pulled down). Where possible, instruments should be used to support the evidence for a case, e. g., tape recorders for sounds. Reports should be filed at some central body, like the S.P.R., where they can be consulted by later investigators.