



## Borley

### Introduction



There cannot be a serious student of the paranormal who has not studied the case of Borley Rectory, the controversial 'Most Haunted House in England'. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the case, or with Harry Price, the psychical researcher who investigated the case at some length in the 1930's, the Harry Price website gives a full account of both Harry Price's career, and the Borley Rectory case.

Para.Science were privileged to be allowed to spend a day and night in July 2006 on the site of the old Borley Rectory, on the anniversary of the very night when the Bull sisters saw the apparition of a ghostly nun, on what later became

known as the 'Nun's Walk'. It must be stressed that we were only allowed to do this as we have friends in the village who were willing to accommodate us - the village is very small and private and the villagers do not appreciate groups of investigators roaming around, indeed there are regular police patrols to prevent that sort of thing. We present here our diary of the visit.

### 27th July 2006

A baking hot summers day, fabulous weather but maybe not for driving down to Essex (especially when the car's air con is broken!). Never mind, we suffer worse things than heat on investigations. 3 of us were travelling down from the North West, A, C and S. We would be meeting SS down in the village ready for an orientation of the area.

The journey down proved fairly uneventful, until the arrival of the thunderstorms! We had caught up with a band of thunderstorms which promised some interesting travelling. We decided to take a break at a motorway service station, rather than running the gauntlet of the rain, thunder, lightning etc. Which was a good idea, as we did not have to drive through the terrible conditions. But was also a bad idea, as sitting in the car in a service station carpark was a bit like sitting in a very humid carwash. At least we could tell how close we were to being hit by lightning due to the Strike Alert lightning detector (we never travel without one!) and I guess being in the car meant that we were probably safer than everyone else around, so I suppose we had some fun watching people taking their chances running across the carpark - run faster, run faster!

The rain eased, so our journey recommenced, then we realised that we were actually catching the storm back up again. But it was almost fun driving through the raging river that had been the A14 not 10 minutes before. And watching the lightning striking the fields either side of the road certainly livened up the journey somewhat.

Another brief stop at the side of the road to stretch our legs, and it became apparent that the storms were following us. So we gave up and carried on with the last leg of the journey. Luckily C remembered the way once we reached the outskirts of Long Melford (yes, it's very, very long hence the name). And so to our destination for the first night - The Bull Inn, one time haunt (and maybe still a haunt?) of the (in)famous Harry Price, psychical researcher during his investigations at Borley. On arrival we met up with SS, and went for a pleasant drink in the beer garden, only slightly marred by a near decapitation due to the storm catching us up and a sudden gust of wind causing the beer garden umbrella at our table to go flying (it was worth it to watch 2 academics attempting to fly whilst bringing the errant broly under control).

Following the near death experience, we decided to go and have a look at Borley church, itself the scene of mysterious happenings. Well you couldn't really have asked for a better atmosphere - warm, humid, rumbling thunder all around. And the famous Borley Church. No sign of the nun though. Maybe she didn't want to be struck by one of the many lightning strikes that were happening around us. Whilst we were stood in the churchyard. Under all the big trees. We may meet Harry sooner than we thought. It was probably at this point that we all realised that we are actually Paranormal Nerds. How cool is this - in Borley churchyard, and staying in the same hotel that Harry Price stayed in. The most well known case ever, and here we are, following in the footsteps of the famous Harry. What can I say but 'wow'. In fact, I'll say 'wow' a few more times, as that didn't seem enough. Wow. We eventually left, as we were getting a bit peckish by now, and were aware that we didn't want to disturb the locals, so we went for a superb meal at a pub in Long Melford. Which was punctuated by outbursts along the lines of 'I can't believe we are doing this', 'how cool is this', 'I've dreamed of doing this' and various other embarrassing nerdy expressions.

Following the meal, we retreated back to the Bull Inn, with the intention of sitting at the very fireplace where Harry sat. Unfortunately the temperature was approaching melting point indoors, so we retreated to the garden for a drink. Following long paranormal tales and discussion, we went back to the fireplace - after all, we couldn't not sit at Harry's fireplace! After a brief chat with the duty manager, we were shown a photocopied history of the building which showed how it has changed over the years. Which made us realise the THE fireplace may not have actually been THE fireplace. But at least we were in the same place. And found some really interesting architectural features. And so to bed, to refresh ourselves ready for the main purpose of the trip - an investigation into the mysterious happenings around Borley church and the site of the old Borley Rectory.

## 28th July 2006

Over breakfast, excitement mounts. We are finally going to spend time on the site of the old Borley Rectory, scene of the most famous haunting in Britain. But first things first - a visit to the second hand book shop is a vital part of any investigation. To the delight of the shop owner, who had nearly not opened that day, we clear the paranormal shelf of books (sorry, C I know we sent you to the shops at the other end of the village then told you we hadn't bought any books, but we might have told a little tiny porkie pie.....!).

First stop of the day, Liston Church (pictured right), site of the burial of the nun's bones allegedly found at Borley by Harry Price.



It was becoming apparent at this point that this was going to become a very hot day indeed, in fact even A, who normally complains non-stop about being cold, was complaining about being too hot. We had also by this point met up with SL, complete with camouflage ready to blend into the background

if spotted by locals. A few recreations of historic photos were taken, then we made our way to Borley.



*First picture:* the burial of the 'nun', Liston churchyard, May 29, 1945. The Rev. A.C. Henning is lowering the casket. Mrs Henning, son Stephen, and Harry Price are at the graveside (from *The End of Borley Rectory*, Harry Price, 1946).



*Second picture:* recreation at Liston churchyard, July 28, 2006. The cast of characters are: SS playing the Reverend Henning, CO as Harry Price, and AW as Mrs Henning. Unfortunately we did not have a convenient child to play the part of the son.

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I have to admit that my memories of the next 24 hours are somewhat surreal, as by this point I had been overwhelmed by both awe and heatstroke, but I shall endeavour to describe events as best I can remember.

We spent a large part of the day sitting in the garden and trying to pinpoint exactly where the rectory used to stand, and where the nun's walk might be.

Pictured left is a view towards nun's walk area. Former rectory site on right hand side, out of picture.

Lots of old books and maps were consulted, and a small amount of scrabbling in the hedge took place, and we pinpointed exactly where we think the boundaries used to be. Some equipment was set up ready for the night's investigation, but it was enough to just sit and take in the atmosphere of being in such a famous place. Plus at least one of us was getting decidedly close to death by heatstroke, so any form of major activity was not really on the cards.

Pictured right is a view of the former rectory site.

After tea, our guests for the investigation started to arrive, and were treated to some videos and talks. The investigation itself concentrated on areas within the house, outside looking at the nun's walk, and Borley church. Unfortunately, we could not start to investigate the church area until well into the night, as there were quite a lot of other people around, presumably with the same idea as us, and we decided the best course of action was to "remain invisible". A course that had



obviously also been decided by the 7 unknown people who were hiding in the graveyard whom we were completely oblivious to, right up until the moment we bumped into them!

The investigation went much as normal, with lots of sitting and measuring, some sleep (well we'd been up all day and had to drive home the following morning!), but whenever we started flagging, we only had to remember where we were and immediately our enthusiasm returned. Unfortunately, there was no apparent paranormal activity to be found anywhere, despite some very recent reports that had been given to us.

As dawn broke, we staked out the lane where the nun has been seen walking. She did not grace us with her presence on this occasion, but this has to have been one of the more enjoyable parts of the whole investigation - peaceful, beautiful scenery, in one of the most famously haunted places in Britain, waiting for a ghost to appear - for an investigator it doesn't get much better than this!



Views looking in either direction of the road where the nun is supposed to walk

And so to breakfast, taken in The Bull Hotel as a last tribute to the late Harry Price. Leaving was hard, both because we knew we had come to the end of a unique event, and because we had so many ideas for further investigations and experiments. But all good things must come to an end, and as we parted we knew we had been privileged to have been allowed access to this famous and intriguing place.