



Ghosts of Chester

Chester was founded by the Romans during the 1st century AD as a military fortress, so it's hardly surprising that it has some well known Roman ghosts.

One is the ghost of a legionary who paces between the **Amphitheatre** and the foundations of a tower which once stood beside the Newgate. One wonders whether he'll be doing more than pacing with the prospect of the other half of the amphitheatre being built over. This is a particularly interesting ghost, as usually successive witnesses of apparitions describe the ghost as being progressively fainter, so you might have a witness in the 1700's describing a ghost in detail, whereas by the late 1900's, witnesses are describing a vague grey shape. This particular ghost is still so clear that he has been identified as a Decurion, an officer in command of 10 men, of the 11th Legion Adiutrix. The story behind this ghost describes how the Decurion was in love with a local Celtic girl. Whenever he was on duty he would leave his men on guard and slip out of a small gate to meet his sweetheart. Unfortunately, the girl's family saw an opportunity in the situation. One night when the Decurion slipped out of the gate, he was pounced on by a gang of Celtic warriors and bound and gagged. The Celts crept in through the gate, killed the sentries and grabbed as much loot as they could. The Decurion managed to break free and ran to raise the alarm, but was killed by one of the Celts. Ever since, he has paced the same route without rest.

Another famous Roman ghost haunts the **George and Dragon pub**. Roman law forbade the burial of the dead within the precincts of a town, fortress or other settlement, except in a real emergency. Because of this, tombs were often located along the roads leading from a settlement, and furnished with sculptured stones to the departed's memory. The George and Dragon stands on one such site. Footsteps can be heard marching through the building, passing through the front and back walls of the pub, following the route of the old Roman road. Nothing has ever been seen of this ghost, only the sound of the strange footsteps. I've spent many an evening in the George with the cat club, and unfortunately have never heard a thing beyond the welcome sound of another pint being drawn.

St John's Church is the site of a haunting by a ghostly monk. This spectre only started appearing following the partial collapse of the great tower in 1881. He has been heard praying, and appears so real, it was only realised that he was not a real monk when he vanished into thin air in front of startled witnesses. A monk, quite possibly the same one, goes to and from the church by the old passage that runs by the side of the west tower and down to the river. This ghost has also been described as following another route, up from the river bank, through the railings of the present Hermitage, and along a secret underground passage that connects the Anchorite Cell with the church. It has also been described as crossing the bowling green to the Anchorite Cell. Obviously a ghost who likes his exercise.

A pair of monks used to haunt **Pepper Street**. They were commonly known as Charlie and Herbert, and had been witnessed for many years. The last time they were seen was in the 1960's. They used to appear in a garage in Pepper Street. When the garage started to open 24 hours a day, none of the staff would volunteer for night duty. New staff brought in to cover the night shift would soon leave with no explanation. It seems that the 2 monks would walk up from the river and vanish in front of the garage pumps, almost on a nightly basis. A member of staff was eventually found who had no problem with a couple of monks vanishing on the forecourt every night, and things might have carried on indefinitely if it wasn't for the fact that the garage closed down. The building was knocked down, and the present day Habitat was built on the site. The monks obviously did not approve of this change, as they have

not been seen since.

Returning to the theme of haunted hostelries, the **Falcon Inn** in Lower Bridge Street has a presence of which we as a group are more than familiar with, a figure in a pub that flings objects around and causes havoc. This particular one is the ghost of a maid-servant who was thrown out onto the street by the less than impressed family who lived there. Shortly afterwards, the maid-servant died, and has caused havoc on occasion ever since. The only peculiar occurrence I've experienced there was on a girl's night out some years ago, when we were most disconcerted to realise that the pub was filling up with men, all of whom appeared to be staring at us. It was only when one of our group went to the bar and looked back that it became apparent the reason for all the interest was in fact the TV screen on the wall behind us which was showing a foreign soft porn channel. No wonder the poor maid servant gets upset.

There are a couple of stories associated with the **Old Kings Head** in Lower Bridge Street. A phantom figure has been seen wandering aimlessly about. The pub was renovated in the 1930's, and under the floorboards of bedroom number 4, a sword was found. It can be seen hanging on the wall today. There could be a connection between the ghost and the sword, but we'll probably never know.

The other story associated with The Old Kings Head concerns a lady who was delivering a car to a car dealer in Chester. She booked into room number 6 for the night - the story says it was New Years Eve 1982, so I hope she was being paid a substantial amount for working on New Years Eve. There are 2 ways of reaching room number 6, and old and peculiar little stairway or a longer route by the modern and wider staircase. At 2am the lady awoke with an intense feeling that something was not quite right. She heard a clock strike 2, and felt a sensation of great cold, coupled with a feeling of her hair standing on end. She turned round and saw a man dressed in black silently watching her. She was quite indignant and puzzled, and wondered how a stranger had managed to enter a locked bedroom. She challenged the man, who simply carried on gazing at her. She wasn't alarmed, but rather felt a sensation of peace and tranquillity. The apparition remained for about 15 minutes then vanished. The lady was so impressed with the soothing and comforting atmosphere that she booked to stay another night. The landlady professed to be unaware of the ghost, but recalled being very reluctant to use the small staircase adjacent to rooms 4,5 and 6, rather using the more modern staircase.

The **Bluebell Restaurant** in Northgate Street is the site of a well known Chester ghost, connected with the Civil War. In 1645, a large Parliamentarian army was advancing on the city from the south under the command of Major-General Sydenham Poyntz. The city's Royalists were mustered and ordered to meet the Roundheads. One cavalier was roused from the building now housing the Blue Bell Restaurant. His lover watched him from an upstairs window as he waved farewell. The Royalists marched to Rowton Heath and awaited the Roundhead force. The King's army met a resounding defeat. The lady in the Blue Bell waited in vain for her lover to return - he was lying dead on the heath. And she still waits for him - a beautiful blonde lady in a flowing cream gown she stands by the left front window on the 1st floor.

Tudor House in Lower Bridge Street is the scene of 2 phantoms - the first a grey lady about whom nothing is known. The second is connected to the siege of the city following the battle at Rowton Heath. During the siege, a cannonball ploughed into the building and decapitated a Royalist who was renting the top floor. Ever since, his ghost has been seen periodically, impeccably dressed apart from his missing head.

Stanley Palace is the scene of 2 hauntings. The one I remember from childhood is the figure of a grey lady, usually seen in the Gallery or the Queen Anne room. I've never seen her, but telling each other stories about her certainly took the minds of my friends and I off our imminent piano exams. I've spent many hours upstairs at Stanley Palace passing the time while awaiting my turn at the piano recitals, gazing down the gallery hoping to see the Grey Lady, but alas she obviously sensed my future hobby of paranormal investigator, and made sure she never appeared while I was in the building.

The other ghost seen here is the spectre of James Stanley, 7th Earl of Derby. He used Stanley Palace as his town house. In 1651 he was arrested, tried and convicted of treason due to his outspoken Royalist views. He was held a prisoner in Stanley Palace before being taken to Bolton to be executed. His ghost is said to stroll through the ground floor rooms, for some reason appearing in negative with a white jacket, black shirt and dark face.

Just down the road from Stanley Palace is the **Queen's School**. If ever a building felt like it ought to have a ghost, it was this one. With creaky little staircases and dark attic rooms, we would have been most disappointed if there was no evidence of supernatural activity here. As it was, the only ghost we were aware of during my time at the school was the ghost of the music room. It was never seen or heard, but frequently during a music lesson, the door would open, even if previously well closed, sufficient time would elapse for someone or something to enter the room, then the door would gently close. We grew so used to this happening, we would all turn round and say hello to whoever, or whatever, was coming into the room. We like to think it appreciated our musical talent.

Probably the most famous Chester ghost is Sarah, who haunts the **Thornton's** chocolate shop in **Eastgate Street** - a ghost after my own heart, spending eternity in a chocolate shop is my idea of heaven. Sarah was said to be a charming young lady who fell in love with an unscrupulous rascal who jilted her on their wedding day. Sarah was so distraught she returned to her home in Eastgate Street and hung herself. Ever since she has caused havoc in the premises. Most events happen in the top floor front room and the cellar, but can happen anywhere. She is never seen, but makes up for it in other ways. The manageress of the shop experienced what can only be called a possession when staff saw her coming down the stairs singing an unknown song and holding her hands out as if lifting a long and heavy dress in order to descend the stairs. She can offer no explanation for this. An American tourist who described the stories of the ghost as rubbish was immediately pushed down the stairs by an invisible hand. An electrician who went to read the meter in the cellar was not down there for long, and ran back up the stairs saying he felt he was being watched by something very unpleasant. Sarah has also proved useful to the local police force - a burglar who broke in and stole the days takings from the safe fled in such a hurry he left behind all his tools and a full set of fingerprints. Sarah was very upset by the Valentines Day display in the shop in 1991. The heart shaped boxes of chocolates were frequently found scattered on the floor of the shop, leaving the ordinary boxes of chocolates that had been stacked in front of them undisturbed. Sarah was quietened for a while in 1965 following an exorcism, but has since recovered and still carries on her tricks to this day.

Watergate Street is the scene of two hauntings - one, in **Watergates Wine Bar**, is a sailor who walks through the building occasionally. He is assumed to date from the time when Chester was still a port, before the Dee estuary started to silt up. The other ghost haunts the street itself. He appears to be searching for something and people have frequently approached him offering help. At this point, he vanishes, so be careful who you offer help to, they may just vanish in front of your eyes.

When the Royal Infirmary was still standing, the ghost of soldier Mackenzie was well known. He was a Scottish soldier admitted with serious wounds during the 1914-18 war. He died of his wounds, and is believed to have been buried in a hospital shroud instead of his uniform. He is believed to be carrying out an eternal search for his missing uniform. Certainly when I worked there a number of staff claimed to have seen him. I wonder what he'll make of the new luxury apartments that have replaced the old hospital.

The **Tourist Information Office** next to the Town Hall has been the site for some wierd experiences. Underneath the double winged staircase leading up to the Town Hall entrance, is a store room for the Tourist Office. A lady working there became aware of someone behind her, and assumed it was another member of staff. This person did not say anything, so the lady turned round to speak, only to realise there was nobody else there, just an oppressive silence. Another member of staff admitted that she had seen a mysterious "something" in the otherwise empty storeroom, but had been reluctant to say anything. She wouldn't go into the room alone. A third member of staff also admitted to experiencing the

same thing. Centuries before, this site was occupied by police cells. It formed part of what is believed to be the Roman legionary hospital.

To end on, while Little Stanney has the only known occurrence of a spectral headless duck, Chester has responded with a herd of invisible cows. A house at the foot of **St Mary's Hill** was the house of the town cowman. Every morning he herded the cattle across the river to graze on the meadow. Every evening he brought them back to a yard at the back of the house. One day the cowman died in his sleep and the cattle called loudly until a neighbour broke down the door and found the cowman's body. To this day, the sound of the cattle lowing can be heard at the corner at the bottom of the hill.