



Wigan Investigation

Para.Science were contacted by the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP) to investigate a case in Wigan. We provide here a censored copy of our findings.

Introduction

This case was passed to Para.Science via the deputy N.I.C. ASSAP. Original contact with ASSAP was via the clients daughter Mrs. X, residing in Cumbria. The contact followed an article on a morning daytime television programme, the daughter telephoning the TV company on behalf of her mother.

Background

The client is a 71 year old widow now living alone in a first floor pensioners flat in warden controlled council accommodation. Her husband died in 1987. She has lived in this flat for one year. Since returning from a holiday in September 1999, the lady has had several experiences that have left her somewhat nervous and recently she has been sleeping with the lights on and on occasion has used prescribed sleeping tablets to help her to sleep.

The following incidents were reported:

1. When looking through the 'peephole' in the flat exterior door. She sees the head and shoulders of a man. The figure has it's back to the door and has black hair. Although until recently she could not see the face she believed this to be her husband.
2. Whilst in her living room she could see faces in two of the paintings displayed on her wall. These she recognised as being the face of her deceased father in law and a boy she knew when she was 15 or 16.
3. She has experienced the 'smell' of burning which she thinks may be that of pipe tobacco similar to a brand her husband smoked when alive.

None of the above incidents have been witnessed by friends / family or visitors to the flat.

After making telephone contact with Mrs. X to arrange a date for a visit, Para.Science received two telephone calls from her asking "If the man outside would come in?" and described how she was concerned and worried about his presence in the hallway outside her flat.

Visit and Interview

i Building and Flat

The lady lives alone on the first floor of a warden controlled, pensioners residential block. Her flat is at the end of a 30 Metre carpeted corridor. She has neighbours below, opposite and to one side only. The other side being the outside of the block. The flat consists of a small hallway leading into an open plan kitchen / living room. A bathroom and the bedroom is off the opposite side of the hallway. The walls were brick / plasterboard with concrete floors. The building is centrally heated with heating turned up

high - which we told was the norm.

ii Interview

The interview was conducted in the lady's living room and she elected to have a friend Mrs. X present throughout.

Case History

She moved into the sheltered accommodation 12 months ago and for the first 6 months nothing untoward was noticed. It was after returning from a holiday in September 1999, that she learned of the death of her cousin. At about the same time she had cause to look through the 'peephole' in her exterior door for the first time. This door leads into the common hallway of the building. She saw the head of a man who was standing outside her door with his back to her door. Upon opening the door, she found nobody to be there. However, whenever she looked through the peephole he was still to be seen. She could not see a face on the figure but felt that it was her husband who had died some 13 years before. The figure had black hair as did her husband, although he had gone grey prior to his death. In recent weeks she has observed that when the corridor lighting is turned off. The figure is seen to be facing the door and has "Two white slits for eyes and looks dead".

Shortly after first seeing the 'man' outside her door she began to see faces appear in two of the paintings on the wall of her living room. In one painting she said she could clearly see the face of her father-in-law, whilst in the other the face of a boy she knew when she was 15 or 16 years old. The faces also appeared in a photograph of herself taken a few years ago. During the interview, the lady pointed out the areas of the paintings and photograph where the faces appeared and said that she could see them all the time unless "She stood very close to the pictures - whereupon they would appear to be normal". Asked if she could see the man through the peephole - she removed the paper cover she had applied and informed us that the man was still there.

She also described how on one occasion she had smelled burning which she thought to be a pipe and although she was not certain thought it to be the brand of pipe tobacco used by her deceased husband. In recent weeks she has been disturbed by 'knocking' at her door in the early hours of the morning. Described as being quiet and just a couple knocks then sounds of quiet movement. This upset her a great deal and she was concerned that the 'man' outside her door was trying to gain entry to her flat. This was the only incident that was verified by her friend who also said that she too had heard a knock at the door one afternoon, but on opening the door nobody was there. Her friend then added that she could have heard other noises and mistook them for knocks upon the flat door.

We then enquired about any other 'unusual' events that had happened to her or her family.

The lady's mother-in-law had apparently been a 'spiritualist' and a medium who held occasional seances. This we were told scared her husband when he was a young man. She herself described one incident many years ago when she met the deceased mother of a friend in the street and told her to 'go away'.

In her previous home - a bungalow - she described several incidents whereby small ornaments had moved or turned around when nobody was present. She did inform us that she believed this to have been caused by her cleaner - who had at the time denied it.

She informed us that the warden in the present accommodation did once tell her that she [warden] had seen the ghost of a woman come out of the ground floor laundry and walk through a wall, but apart from that one tale she or her friend were not aware of any other unusual activity within the building.

Apart from her friend Mrs. X and her daughter she had decided to tell no-one else about what she was

seeing and experiencing. Mrs. xxxxxxxx did in fact tell the vicar of her local Methodist church of which she is a member. The vicar visited before Christmas 1999 and blessed the flat. This had no effect and Mrs. X continued to see both the man in the peephole and the faces in the paintings. It was subsequent to this that her daughter contacted the TV programme.

Medical History (compiled by S. Parsons RGN)

The lady suffers from Glaucoma of both eyes and in the past has had two eye lens replacements to treat bilateral cataracts. The glaucoma was described as being controlled by drops but had noticeably worsened since last Autumn. She now has to visit the ophthalmologist every 3 months instead of the former annual visit. She also described how her poor eyesight caused problems seeing curb edges to pavements and created a 'glow' around bright light sources. The lady also takes additional medication for an unspecified condition but understood to be the Glaucoma which had to be changed recently as it caused her to hallucinate. The present medication does not have this side-effect. Small in stature and physically slight of build, she is non-the-less in generally good health and was fully mobile and self attending. She showed no signs of dementia or memory dysfunction.

Site Examination

Mrs. X pointed to the faces that she could see on the two paintings and fetched the photograph that also contained faces from another room.

The first painting, that containing the face of her father-in-law was c. 18x24 inches and showed an indoor scene with a women in a red dress in front of a window. Adjacent to the window on the extreme right hand edge of the painting was a vase of flowers in which Mrs. X could see the face. This present all the time irrespective of time of day or lighting conditions. She could see the face whilst we all examined the painting but did add "That if she got up close to the painting, the face was no longer to be seen".

The second, smaller painting showed several young girls in Victorian dress playing in a field. She pointed to an area of grass within the central part of the painting where she could see that face of a boy she knew when she had been a girl of 15 or 16 years.

The paintings were examined and photographed by the investigators but nothing untoward was observed either at the time or on subsequent examination of the photographs taken.

The investigators then asked to have a look through the peephole on the external door.

Mrs. X removed the paper which was covering the spy-hole and allowed the investigators to look through. It was immediately apparent that a blemish existed on the lens of the peephole viewer, which closely resembled the outline of a human head. This blemish was centrally placed and the highly curved lens elements [to permit an extremely wide angle of view] was catching the light from nearby corridor lighting and making the blemish appear to be an upright oval which did, to both investigators appear to approximate with a human head. In the centre of the blemish was a pair of bright highlights caused by the internal reflection and refraction of corridor lighting - this too was consistent with Mrs. X's description of the 'two white slits for eyes'. A cotton bud was secured from the lady and the front and rear glass elements were cleaned to see if that would remove the blemish. It was in fact located on the interior of the lens elements and so it was not possible to remove it.

Next we asked for the corridor lighting to be turned off and enquired of Mrs. X what she could see under such conditions. She looked into the viewer and reported that the head was still there and had one white eye that was looking at her. The investigators then took it in turn to look into the viewer and again the answer was immediately apparent. The hemispherical rear lens element was picking up light from the flat room lighting and reflecting/refracting it internally through the viewer, making the blemish

even more apparent. Furthermore, a single emergency light in the hallway outside the flat was casting a single white highlight into the viewer.

It was now quite clear what the source of the face in the peephole was caused by and when this was explained and demonstrated to Mrs. X she was more than a little relieved.

Cause and Effect

After discussing our thoughts on the likely cause of the face in the peephole and suggesting that her glaucoma and earlier cataract surgery may have some bearing on the faces within the painting, Mrs. X showed obvious relief. She then went on to talk about how much stress she had been under in recent months caused not the images but resulting from various family crises. She went on to tell the investigators that she had suspected the cause to be innocent at the start of the appearances, but that as time went on she allowed them to become more significant. Her eyesight she acknowledged had dramatically deteriorated since just before going on the holiday in September last and she described her inability to distinguish curb edges when walking outside for example. She had previously mentioned that the faces in the paintings only were visible when she was looking at the paintings from a normal distance - if she went up close, the faces vanished.

Mrs. X, then again mentioned her medication which she had requested her GP to change as she felt it caused her to 'see things'.

The reported knocking at her door was again mentioned, at this point Mrs. X said how her downstairs neighbour was an elderly gentleman who could have been the cause. In order for him to use the toilet, it was necessary for him to leave his bedsit flat as the toilet was shared and along the hallway. His door - in fact all the doors were spring loaded and tended to slam. This was confirmed by the investigators as when we were in the corridor outside Mrs. X's flat, the door sprung shut with a quite a bang, locking us all out of the flat until the key was obtained from the warden.

Mrs. A [friend] confirmed our suspicions that the downstairs neighbour's door was the most likely cause of the knocks heard and interpreted to be from Mrs. X's door located directly above.

In Conclusion

After a careful review of the case and upon interviewing the client and examination of the location Para. Science wills confident to conclude that in this case no incident could be attributable to paranormal activity or any unexplainable cause.

The following points should be made in explaining this conclusion:

i. Mrs. X had her first sighting of the man's head in the peephole viewer the day she returned from holiday after receiving the news of her cousins death. That she had lived in the flat for approx. 6 months prior to that time and had never had any cause to use the viewer and this was the first time she had done so and was surprised to see the man there.

ii. That Mrs. X has defective vision caused by primary Glaucoma - a condition recognised to cause visual disturbances that include, halos or highlights around bright light sources. It is also known to cause misty objects that appear to 'float' in the vision field. Her peripheral vision was also blurred causing her to be unable to see for example the edges of curbs. The Glaucoma had worsened around the time of the original sighting of the man, and the subsequent faces within the paintings. Mrs X also has received two replacement eye lenses as a treatment for cataracts - another condition known to severely degrade visual acuity.

iii. That Mrs. X had been under considerable stress in the last 6 months as a result of various family

related problems involving her daughter and grandchildren.

iv. Mrs X also mentioned the medication which had caused her to hallucinate.

Furthermore:

v. Both investigators could clearly see the blemish in the peephole viewer that resembled the man's head described by Mrs. X, including the white slit like eyes.

vi. The absence of any additional witnesses to the incidents described by Mrs. X, other than the one event of knocking heard by her friend Mrs. A. This at the time was put down to a neighbour's door, when it was found that nobody was knocking on Mrs. X's flat door.

vii. The absence of any other event that could be described as unusual apart from the unsubstantiated account by the warden of the ghostly woman in the laundry - which both Mrs. X and her friend doubted actually took place, being rather a fabrication of the warden.

After taking these factors into consideration and after discussing the case with the client we [Para.Sci-ence] and Mrs. X believe that the following scenario is the most plausible explanation for the untoward events experienced.

"That Mrs. X returned from her holiday to receive the upsetting news about the death of her cousin. She then had cause to make first use of her door peephole viewer and observed the existing blemish which resembled a man's head and which she interpreted as being that of her deceased husband - her imagination filling in the gaps to make the indistinct image appear with greater clarity.

Thus unnerved and unaware at the time of her worsening Glaucoma she misinterpreted optical blurring of her vision upon paintings to be faces of people she once knew - again with her brain filling in missing details.

Now more disturbed by the visions she could not shake the images and thus continued to see them whenever she looked into the peephole or looked at the paintings - the faces that are seen in the fire might be a good example of this phenomena here.

After a visit to the ophthalmologist her medication was changed to a drug that caused hallucination and further visions - this time in the photograph. The sleeping medication also may have contributed to this effect.

At night, Mrs. X would retire to bed after taking sleeping medication and some hours later would hear her downstairs neighbour going to and from the toilet. Because of her already heightened anxiety these sounds she attributed to knocks at her own door.

All these causes began to develop into a spiral of cause and effect and at each stage her anxiety increased, further increasing her level of misperception of the events. Eventually, a state existed when despite her normal rational outlook she was forced to believe that her flat was haunted by the figure of her dead husband outside the door and the apparitions of the faces of people she once knew contained within the two paintings and one photograph."

The investigators described this likely scenario to Mrs. X to her immediate relief. Both she and her friend agreed readily that this was in fact the most likely sequence of events and her friend that she had thought all along that something like this was the cause.

Mrs. X said she would now accept an offer from a relation to change the peephole viewer - an offer apparently made some months before.

Para.Science are maintaining contact with Mrs. X and are continuing to monitor the case but we feel it unlikely that any further visions or apparitions will put in an appearance. We believe that over time Mrs. X, with the support and assistance of her friend will stop seeing the faces in the paintings and man outside her door and that life will return to normal. With an explanation of events that satisfy the client we also believe [and observed] that the stress induced by the visions will diminish and the spiral of action and reaction will cease.

Note

This report has been compiled with the full knowledge and co-operation of Mrs. X and her family and she is fully aware and agrees with the conclusions reached as a result of this investigation. Mrs. X is aware that a copy of this report will be passed in confidence to ASSAP who passed the original report to Para.Science for investigation. She has also consented to a censored copy of this report to be posted onto the Para.Science website for the interest and comment of other investigators of the paranormal. The web based version will of course maintain the Para.Science policy of guaranteeing the anonymity of Mrs. X and her family.