Part One

Experience

One

Manifestation

How did people know they had seen a ghost? What distinguished the spirits of the dead from their former earthly selves? When someone known to have died appeared to the living then it was an obvious deduction that the vision was a ghost, but in numerous cases ghost and percipient were not known to each other. There had to be other diagnostic characteristics. The reality of existence itself would have been thrown into doubt if the living could not be distinguished from the dead. Translucence and pale opacity were obvious determinants but by no means all ghosts exhibited these qualities. Some did not even appear in human form. As we shall see, though, there was usually a tell-tale sign that one was in the presence of a spirit, even if its exact nature was not always clear. Ghosts shared certain characteristics with fairies, angels and devils, and the tricky task of distinguishing between them often depended on the context in which they appeared; and this in turn changed over the centuries according to religious, philosophical and scientific developments.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Ghosts usually preferred a solitary sojourn on earth. Apart from battlefield hauntings and the occasional funeral procession they hardly ever made collective appearances. Seeing ghosts was likewise usually a solitary experience. Rarely has more than one person seen a ghost at the same time, though they often appeared to different people at different times. This has always been one of the key arguments against their reality. According to folk tradition, though, some people were unable to see ghosts due to their date of birth. Some said that first-born sons could not see ghosts, and in the opinion of others neither could those born on Christmas Eve.[1] Perhaps this was a better birthright than being particularly sensitive to the appearance of spirits, which in Somerset was a gift bestowed on those born between midnight and dawn on a Friday.[2]

Regarding the gender of ghosts, it is true that in the medieval English and continental sources most were male, as were most percipients.[3] It has to be taken into account, of course, that the authors were usually members of the clergy living in exclusively or predominantly male social circles. The gender imbalance is less obvious in post-Reformation English sources. Although authors and publishers were still predominantly male, in the age of print there was a significant female readership, which may have affected the way in which ghosts were presented. Women were also actively involved in the reporting of ghostly experiences to the likes of Glanvill and Baxter. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women, as spiritualist mediums, folklorists and members of the SPR, were at the forefront of experiencing and investigating encounters with the spirits of the dead. This increasing public female involvement generated a more even proportion of female and male ghost sightings.

It is an intriguing fact that from the medieval period to the present the ghosts of children have rarely been seen in England. The ghost of a murdered child that haunted the countryside near Graythwaite, Cumbria, in the nineteenth century is an unusual example.[4] Infant and childhood mortality was shockingly high for most of the period covered by this study, yet the tragedy of infant death did not seem to translate into a tradition of spiritual manifestation. The deep cultural as well as religious significance of this paucity is suggested by a comparison with the strength of the child ghost tradition in Scandinavian and Baltic folk belief. A survey of nineteenth-century Polish ghost-lore found that 11 per cent of hauntings concerned the spirits of aborted children. In Finland the nightmare experience was sometimes blamed on the ghosts of dead babies, and a diverse array of traditions have been recorded in Sweden and Norway concerning the ghosts of children who were murdered, abandoned, stillborn or who died before baptism or name-giving.[5] As a study of this tradition observed, the position of such infants was 'problematic in that they have never really belonged to the living social group'.[6]

The significance of child-ghosts in Poland is understandable, as are the numerous Irish and French legends of the spirits of unbaptised children appearing as lights or birds.[7] In Catholic countries the medieval concept of *limbus puerorum*, the intermediate state between heaven and earth where the souls of unbaptised children resided for eternity, remained a strong theme in popular belief right through to the present day. While the similar prominence of child ghosts in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lutheran Scandinavia may also reflect the continuance of old Catholic traditions in post-Reformation folklore, the lack of a similar tradition in England suggests that the absence or presence

of child-ghost legends reflects pre-medieval patterns of belief rather than the success of English Protestant reformers.

There are, however, a few intriguing references in seventeenth-century depositions to the ghosts of adults appearing in the shape of children. In Somerset, during the 1630s, the ghost of one Mother Leakey was seen by a woman 'in the shape of a little child shining very bright and glorious'.[8] A woman who claimed to have seen Priscilla Beauty's ghost in 1650 stated she saw it 'in the shape of a girl about a dozen years old walking up and down the yard'. In 1662, Isabel Binnington of Hull said that the ghost of Robert Eliot, murdered 14 years before, appeared to her 'resembling a boy about twelve years old', as well as in adult form with 'long flaxen hair in green cloaths, and bare-footed', and also 'in white, like a winding sheet'.[9] These seventeenth-century examples presumably reflect the long tradition of Christian pictorial representation of souls ascending to heaven in the forms of naked children. They, along with doves, symbolised the innocence and purity of the soul once freed from the polluted body.

HAUNTING TIMES

Hallowtide, which consists of the Catholic feasts of All Saints' Day (1 November) and All Souls' Day (2 November), is particularly linked with the appearance of ghosts, a brief period when the boundary between the living and the dead was more permeable than at any other time in the Christian calendar. However, the association is, perhaps, not as venerable a tradition as might be thought. In medieval Europe neither day served, as Jean-Claude Schmitt put it, 'as privileged anchoring points for apparitions of the dead'.[10] As far as one can tell from medieval accounts of apparitions, ghosts were more associated with the period from Christmas to the Epiphany. Even then the Christian significance seems less important than the environmental factor of midwinter darkness. Moving eastwards to the Orthodox churches of Europe, Easter and Pentecost were most associated with the communion of the living and the dead, while in Estonian tradition ghosts were thought to prefer appearing in the autumn, or more specifically in the period between Michaelmas (29 September) and Christmas.[11] In fact it could be argued that All Saints' Day was the least likely time to see a ghost as communities made a concerted effort to keep them at bay. The religious observance most associated with the day in pre-Reformation England was the ringing of the church bells. As Ronald Hutton has shown, it proved one of the most stubborn of Catholic practices, with the Elizabethan church authorities pursuing numerous prosecutions up

and down the country. Other commemorative customs, which were not reliant on the church, continued clandestinely amongst Catholics and by Protestant communities down the centuries.[12] There is some debate amongst historians as to whether the practice of bell ringing on All Saints' Day was popularly perceived as intercessionary, comforting and thereby propitiating the souls of the dead, or was a more aggressive act of protection intended to ward them off.[13] Either way, it was not a good day to see ghosts, and, anyway, in post-Reformation England there is little evidence that, despite the suppression of bell ringing, ghosts were popularly thought to have recolonised the country at Hallowtide.

Today Halloween is, of course, most associated with the *imitation* of ghosts and noisy spirits rather than concerns over their actual appearance. As we shall see later in this book, people have been donning white sheets and roaming the streets for centuries, and the practice was particularly common in nineteenth-century towns and cities. But analysing all the numerous court cases that arose from such pranks there is no sense that this was a Halloween tradition. In fact, ghost imitators were just as likely to jump out on people or flit across fields on warm summer evenings as long winter nights. This comes as no real surprise, as Halloween as we know and observe it today is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon derived from America, which developed out of a strong Irish tradition of making mischief and mimicking malicious spirits on All Hallows' Eve.[14]

The time of day rather than the time of year is a more significant issue in the study of hauntings. While ghosts have certainly been seen in daylight, over the last thousand years the vast majority paid nocturnal visits. There was no obvious explanation why this should be, and it was evidently an issue that puzzled many over the centuries. The night was popularly thought to be the most conducive time for devils, fairies and evil spirits to emerge from the depths of hell or the bowels of the earth. From a religious perspective of inversion, if God, the angels and the saints were radiant, casting light wherever Christianity was practised (as iconography depicted them), then it stood to reason that darkness, by contrast, was the natural home of the ungodly and the damned. Neither was purgatory illumined by God's effulgence, and so in the medieval period the spirits of the dead visiting from purgatory would not be allowed to appreciate the divine light of earthly day. When one medieval ghost was asked, 'Why do you appear to me at night rather than during the day?', it replied, 'As long as I cannot go to God, I remain in the night.'[15] But most ghosts were not considered evil, the Devil's minions, or the eternally damned, and furthermore, after the Reformation they were not bound by purgatorial punishment. They often helped the living, returning to right wrongs and reveal

injustice. As one eighteenth-century sceptic observed, 'in common reason, spirits have no more to do with night, than day-light; and if any information was really providentially intended by them; day-light, and publick places of resort, would be the properest for their apparition'.[16]

In post-Reformation England, then, other explanations were required, and those proffered were couched in either demonic, scientific or psychological terms. The explanation put forward by the Elizabethan writer Thomas Nashe was simple. He believed apparitions were nothing more than devilish delusions, and, since God had allocated the night as the Devil's kingdom, it stood to reason that he would cast his apparitions in the dark. 'There is no thief that is half so hardy in the day as in the night; no more is the devil.'[17] Nashe's explanation was only satisfactory if one rejected the possibility that the spirits of the dead returned, but many educated people did not. Perhaps science could justify this faith. The philosopher Henry More believed he knew the answer as to why 'Apparitions haply appear oftner in the Night than in the Day'. It was, he suggested, to do with the quality of night-time air and the ability of spirits to spin a physical form for themselves out of aerial matter. He thought that the damp, clammy air of the night was 'more easily reduced to visible consistency' by the 'imagination' of spirits. He was adamant, though, that human imagination could not generate such physical materialisations.[18] The anonymous author of *Aristotle's New Book of Problems*, which was printed several times for a general reading public during the early eighteenth century, further added that, because ghosts were formed from air, the heat of the sun would dissolve their vaporous mantle.[19] By the early eighteenth century, however, the Neoplatonic conceptions that inspired More's theory had been largely discarded in intellectual circles. Ghosts were not realities but figments of the imagination. When the Rev. Henry Bourne puzzled over the matter in the early eighteenth century he focused on the introspection that the night encouraged. Darkness brought on intimations of the Day of Judgement and so 'inclines us to grave and serious Thoughts, raises in us Horrour and Dismay, and makes us afraid'.[20]

MATERIALISATION

An acquaintance of the Victorian Cornish antiquarian Joseph Hammond once described how the ghost of a miner he knew appeared first as a puff of smoke. It 'circled round and round and then gathered itself into a sort of tiny cloud, which hung suspended a few feet above the ground. Surprise gave place to terror, as the smoke gradually assumed the form of his dead comrade.'[21] In

1790 it was reported that the deceased wife of a London bookseller appeared to a friend of her husband 'entirely encircled in a thick blue vapour, and which, upon her disappearing, always left a very strong scent'.[22] Most accounts of ghosts, however, say little about the manner in which they appeared. People rarely had time to sit and stare at ghosts for hours on end. Unless they had some terrible burden to get off their ethereal chests or a task to complete (behaviour most common in the early modern period), ghosts usually only appeared for seconds or minutes before disappearing. On first seeing a ghost, then, the attention was fixed immediately on its appearance and the senses were stunned by the initial shock.

A little more detail is forthcoming about how ghosts disappeared. This was the culmination of the experience, the senses had adjusted and concentration was intense. In 1662 a ghost was described as vanishing by 'glideing away without any motion of steps'.[23] An old labourer of Satterthwaite, Cumbria, recalled how, around 1825, as he rode in a cart one day, he saw the ghost of a woman, 'dressed well but old-fashionedly, suddenly leave the highway and rapidly ascend into the air, finally disappearing from sight'.[24] Ghosts hardly ever exited by sinking into the ground, as they traditionally did on the stage, and rarely did they disappear by walking through walls or other solid objects, as in films. Despite the cultural influence of modern media, even in twentieth-century reports the latter behaviour is relatively uncommon.[25] Ghosts evidently respected physical entrances such as doors and passageways.

Over the centuries ghosts have often been reported to have a luminescent quality, and sometimes, particularly outdoors, manifested themselves as lights, often of a bluish hue. A man of St Austell told Joseph Hammond how he was going home one summer evening when he saw a pale, bluish light. In typical pixy-led fashion, he lost his way, and, as he began to feel exhausted, the light went out and in its place he saw a man wheeling a barrow. He cried out as it approached and the ghost stopped and melted away. Some locals subsequently told him that a few years before a miner pushing a barrow had fallen into a disused mineshaft near the spot.[26] The appearance of the soul as an indistinct luminescence is found in the tradition of death lights or corpse candles. They were described as blue lights about three feet high, which left the house just before or at the moment of death and followed the path that the funeral procession would take. They would then enter the church and rest at the spot where the coffin would be placed, lighting up the whole church before moving to the grave plot and disappearing. The appearance of a death light was considered a good a sign for it foretold the soul was at peace. A detailed seventeenth-century account of similar mysterious lights in Wales described how, 'If it be a little Candle, pale or blewish, then follows the Corps either of

an Abortive, or some Infant, if a big one, then the Corps of some one come to Age, if there be seen two or three, or more, some big, some small together, then so many, and such Corpses together.'[27] In the early twentieth century it was observed that although the belief in corpse candles was once widespread, it was by then held by only a few old people.[28]

These dead lights have long been equated with the strange gaseous lights emanating from damp and boggy places, known variously as will-o'-the-wisps, Jack o' Lanterns or *ignis fatui*. The phenomenon was widely interpreted in popular cultures across Europe and beyond as the manifestation of either the spirits of the dead or fairies, and England was no exception.[29] In Somerset, for example, spunkies, as they were also known, were thought to be the souls of unbaptised children.[30] It was the apparent deliberateness of their movement and predilection for following people that gave them a supernatural quality. It would be wrong to assume, however, that people thought every blue light they saw on a dark night was a ghost. There was popular awareness that some *ignis fatui* had natural causes. It was the context in which they appeared and their behaviour that shaped the interpretation of their existence. This is apparent from the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould's interview with William Henry Shopland, of Broadwoodwidger. One evening at harvest time around 1860, Shopland and several others saw a strange light dancing about in the spot where, not long before, two girls had been gleaning. The girls were the daughters of a neighbour, William Hicks, whose son had recently died. According to Shopland, the light 'ran from place to place as though tracking their footsteps … we saw it perfectly, as a blue candle flame. It moved up and down and finally settled on a mow.' Shopland and others saw the light in the same field for three or four months. Because it was dry ground he did not think it was a Jack o' Lantern. 'We thought that young Hicks who had died was troubled in his mind about something, and that this was his spirit.'[31] The Northamptonshire poet John Clare (1793–1864) had also seen many will-o'-the-wisps and considered them nothing more than bog vapours, until one night he and a companion were entranced at seeing two seemingly playing with each other. It 'robd me of the little philosophic reason[in]g which I had', he confessed; 'about them I now believe them spirits'.[32]

DRESS

In his survey of popular beliefs the eighteenth-century antiquarian Francis Grose remarked that 'Ghosts commonly appear in the same dress they usually wore whilst living; though they are sometimes cloathed all in white; but that

is chiefly the churchyard ghosts.'[33] This is an accurate observation apart from the last statement. White-sheeted or shrouded ghost were also sometimes seen in homes and on the streets. John Clare wrote how there had recently been 'a great upstir in town about the appearance of the ghost of an old woman who had been recently drownd in a well – it was said to appear at the bottom of neighbour Billings close in a large white winding sheet dress'. He and a neighbour spent several nights waiting for it to appear, but saw nothing.[34] Up until the nineteenth century it was common for the poor to bury their dead in such winding sheets or shrouds. Only the wealthy could afford a wooden coffin. After the corpse had been washed and laid out, a white sheet, sometimes the bedsheet on which the person died, was wrapped around the body allowing only the face to be seen, with the cloth fastened at the head and feet to ensure the corpse did not slip out when being placed in the grave. The sheet had traditionally been made of linen, like Jesus' shroud, but a law of 1666 ordered that they be made of wool to help boost the textile industry. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the wealthy elite increasingly discarded the traditional winding sheet, clothing corpses in tailor-made funerary outfits consisting of a white shirt or smock and a cap.[35] John Aubrey recounted that the Oxford philologist Henry Jacob, who died on 5 November 1652, appeared a week later to his cousin, the doctor William Jacob, 'standing by his Bed, in his Shirt, with a white Cap on his Head', which was presumably how he was dressed in his coffin.[36] However, only a minority of ghosts were seen in their winding sheet or shroud, and the image was more of a stereotype, exploited by hoaxers and used in literary and pictorial representations over the centuries. Medieval illuminated manuscripts sometimes depicted the apparition of the prophet Samuel in a shroud.[37] During the seventeenth century one woodcut of a ghost in a winding sheet tied up at the top of the head but loose at the bottom, and with taper in hand, was used over and over again to illustrate ballads and pamphlets concerning ghosts.[38]

Because of the stereotypical image of ghosts swathed in white fabric, the wearing of pale clothes, such as workers' smocks, could be risky on dark nights. In December 1851 it was reported how a couple living in Alum Street, Great Ancoats, Manchester, were returning home from the market when the wife looked down a dark alleyway near their home and saw 'something very white', which frightened her. She clung to her husband and exclaimed, 'Oh dear me, there's a ghost!' The intrepid husband pursued the white figure and managed to catch it. It turned out to be a young thief named James Devine who had just robbed Taylor's Mill in Alum Street and was making off with a swathe of white calico cloth, which he had draped around himself. He was subsequently prosecuted.[39] A less satisfactory intervention by the police

followed the sighting of a spooky white figure that kept appearing by a lane in Hollybush Hill, Hampstead, in November 1836. Several people had been terrified to suddenly see a white apparition flitting to and from behind a wall, and one night a young woman named Williams was so alarmed by 'the ghost' that she ran shrieking to PC Simmons, who happened to be patrolling in the area. Similar incidents had been previously reported and so that night, around ten o'clock, Inspector Aggs and two constables determined to confront the apparition. While searching the bushes around the premises where the ghost had been sighted, they were attacked by a pale figure. It turned out to be a solicitor named E.P. Sutton, who evidently had a penchant for white apparel. Sutton was knocked down by the constables, dragged to the police station and charged with assault. The magistrate at Marylebone police court subsequently dismissed the case due to conflicting evidence.[40]

Tragedy ensued in Hammersmith on 3 January 1804 when a bricklayer named Thomas Milward was shot dead around ten o'clock at night by an Excise Officer named Francis Smith who mistook him for a ghost.[41] For over a month an apparition, usually garbed in a white sheet though sometimes wearing an animal skin, had plagued the neighbourhood. It was rumoured that the wife of a locksmith had died of fright and two others were dangerously ill from the shock of being confronted by the ghostly figure. William Girdler, a local watchman, testified that the alarm caused by the ghost was 'very great', 'many people were very much frightened'. It was rumoured to be the spirit of a local man who had cut his throat a year or so before.[42] Every evening a group of young men patrolled the area looking for it. It was certainly unwise to be out at night in white clothing – as was a bricklayer named Thomas Milward on the night in question. His working apparel consisted of white linen trousers, a white flannel waistcoat and a white apron. Only a few nights before, as he made his way home from work, he had frightened a gentleman and two ladies in a carriage. The gentleman had called out 'there goes the ghost', to which Milward replied that he was no such thing, swore at him, and threatened to punch him in the head. After this incident Milward's mother-in-law begged him to change clothes: '"Thomas," says I, "as there is a piece of work about the ghost, and your clothes look white, pray do put on your great coat, that you many not run any danger."' He evidently refused.

On the night of the third, Francis Smith was in the White Hart pub when the conversation turned to the ghost. Fuelled by drink, Smith decided to put an end to the haunting and was joined in his quest by Girdler. They agreed to take separate paths in order to cover more ground, and they were conscious enough to arrange a watchword to ensure they did not shoot each other. Espying a white figure between the hedges of Black Lion Lane, Smith twice

asked it to identify itself. Receiving no reply and seeing it continue to advance he shot it with his fowling gun. As soon as Smith realised he had killed a man he gave himself up to the local magistrate. He was subsequently found guilty at the Old Bailey of murdering Milward and was sentenced to death, but was swiftly reprieved and had his sentence reduced to one year's imprisonment. In July he received a free pardon from the king.

By no means all ghosts were pale visions. In the various collections of ghost sightings published during the second half of the seventeenth century, there are several ghosts that percipients swore looked just as they had dressed in life. The ghost of a gentleman of Marlborough named Edward Aven appeared to several people in 1674 'in the same Cloathes, which he wore in his life time; as a long White-Crown'd hatt, Blew Cloaths, and White Stockings'. Likewise the ghost of Mistress Bretton, wife of Dr Bretton of Ludgate, Deptford, appeared to her servant maid 'in a morning Gown, the same in appearance with that she had often seen her Mistris wore'. In such cases there was nothing visually to distinguish the dead from the living. Indeed Bretton's maid exclaimed, 'were not my Mistris dead, I should not question but you are she'.[43]

Francis Grose observed that English ghosts hardly ever wore black.[44] This was true for his time, but not for the entire period covered by this book. In medieval Western Europe the colour of ghosts' clothing was represented as changing from black to white as they progressed through purgatory.[45] In post-Reformation England this symbolism was obviously rendered redundant and black ghosts became a rarity. During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, sightings of black-clad apparitions became quite numerous again, as is evident from reports sent to the SPR.[46] This reflected, perhaps, the spread of formalised black mourning attire in Victorian England, the price of silk crepe having reduced massively over the previous 100 years.[47] For reasons to be discussed later, there was also a significant increase in the number of apparitions of nuns sighted during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. To give just one instance that combines both observations, a female ghost clad in a black silk gown, which haunted a farm on the Isle of Axholme, Lincolnshire, was thought to be associated with a religious house that once stood on the spot.[48]

There is a distinct tradition of the ghostly White Lady. The folklore sources are full of examples. There was the woman in white that frequented a lakeside spot near Hawkshead, and one with buckled shoes that haunted a pond at Llwynberried.[49] The Shropshire folklorist L.H. Hayward, writing in the 1930s, knew of several White Ladies in the county. One at Longnor lived in a pool and would come out and dance on the green at night.[50] Another emerged from a 'bottomless' pool near Morton, Lincolnshire and proceeded to glide over the

surrounding area.[51] With their liking for deep pools and other watery places, and in some cases a lack of historical association or back-story, many of the White Ladies seem more fairy-like than ghosts. One folklorist has suggested White Lady figures in early literature had no ghostly characteristics at all, and that it seemed they had 'been degraded from a form of mother goddess to a kind of fairy and finally to a ghost'.[52] While the link to female divinity worship is stretching the evidence too far, the suggestion that the White Lady is a fairy archetype is pertinent. Across much of England, Cornwall being a singular exception, fairy belief was in serious decline by the eighteenth century. Examples of people professing to see fairies are few and far between in the folklore sources compared to ghost sightings. It is quite likely that long-held traditions regarding the appearance of ethereal fairy women, even queens, would be reinterpreted in terms of more 'realistic' female ghosts.

The conundrum of why ghosts wear clothing will be discussed later, but suffice it to say that sightings of naked ghosts were exceedingly rare throughout the period concerned.[53] There are a few medieval examples, such as the Rochester priest whose shivering, naked appearance was symbolic of the way in which his estate had been denuded by his executors.[54] One of the very few reports of a ghost in the altogether concerned a shepherd named Charles Taylor, whose experience can be dated to the early nineteenth century. Returning home one evening from folding his sheep near Bampton, Oxfordshire, he was much frightened to see briefly the apparition of a naked man beside him on the road.[55] The shepherd may not have been hallucinating. In another instance a nude ghost proved to be flesh and blood. In January 1834, George Barlow, a flashing Primitive Methodist of Winsford, was sentenced to three months' hard labour. For three years an apparition or 'boggart' in the guise of a naked man appeared every few months at night on the roads around the village, causing much consternation to the local population. The *Macclesfield Courier* reported that women 'dared not venture out of doors after dusk' for fear of the obscene spirit. The boggart was eventually laid after appearing at the window of a pub between eleven and twelve o'clock at night on 4 January, scaring a female servant who was scrubbing the floor. Her screams brought her master to the scene. He managed to overpower the naked Barlow and hand him over to the local constable.[56]

HEADLESS

The headless or acephalous ghost is one of the classic ghost stereotypes, present in folk tradition across Europe. It is also the rarest of firsthand ghost sightings,

based more on legend than experience. In England we find a little evidence for headless ghosts in the medieval period. According to the fifteenth-century chronicler John Warkworth, amongst the numerous ominous tokens seen in 1473, people between Leicester and Banbury and elsewhere 'herde a long tyme cryinge, "Bowes! Bowes!" whiche was herde of xl. menne; and some menne saw that he that cryed soo was a hedles manne'.[57] Examples are more forthcoming from the seventeenth century onwards. Richard Baxter related several cases. An acquaintance of his, Colonel John Bridges, saw 'something like a headless Man' as he peered out of a window one night at Edson Hall, near Alcester. Then there was the servant who had murdered his master and fled to Ireland, and was haunted by the apparition of a headless man whenever he lay alone in bed. Despite lacking a head, the ghost would say to him 'Wilt thou yet confess?' Its repeated visits eventually drove him to give himself up.[58] A broadside reported in 1722 that the apparition of a funeral procession conducted by headless men had been seen marching towards the residence of the late Duke of Buckingham.[59] A hundred years later the Rev. J.C. Atkinson (1814–1900) recalled how in his Essex childhood he knew of the ghost of a headless lady in a blood-stained nightdress that appeared during certain phases of the moon.[60] Early the following century, a man was sometimes seen on the road near Peter's Pool, Hay-on-Wye, carrying his head in his hands.[61] Many more examples could be given from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The obvious explanation for headless ghosts is that they represent those who had their heads chopped off. It has been suggested that the absence of acephalous ghosts in Ancient Greek and Roman sources was because beheading was a rare form of punishment or modus operandi of murderers.[62] In England it was not particularly common either. From the Anglo-Saxon period hanging was the main form of execution. Still, there are examples of beheadings from Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, and in some cases the method was evidently used as a ritual act to prevent the victims' corpses from rising from the grave.[63] Beheading was rarely employed in early modern England, and the few occasions when it was meted out concerned treasonous members of the aristocracy held in the Tower of London. The most famous victim was, of course, Anne Boleyn, whose headless ghost is rumoured to still haunt the vicinity of the Tower. There are hardly any instances of people seeing headless Anglo-Saxon ghosts, however, and most acephalous ghosts did not hang around the Tower of London, nor did they have any association with treasonous activities. So there is little direct link between beheading and headless spirits.

People in the past also pondered why some of the non-aristocratic ghosts haunting their neighbourhoods had no head, and a general association was made with head and neck injuries. The headless horseman who, every New

Year's Eve, haunted a track between Penselwood and Stourton, in Wiltshire, was thought to be the ghost of a man who made a wager at Wincanton market to ride his horse to his home in Stourton in seven minutes. He cut across country and broke his neck going down the track. The headlessness of the ghost of a smuggler near Crowborough, Sussex, was attributed to the fact that he was shot in the head by a gamekeeper.[64] But rationalising headless ghosts takes us only so far in understanding them. What of the many headless animal ghosts, such as the bear-like apparition seen by a Royalist soldier named Simon Jones during the Civil War, or the headless horse and pig that appeared occasionally in the parish of Tillington, Sussex, during the mid nineteenth century?[65] There is clearly a deeper meaning.

The conundrum of headless ghosts can be situated in terms of Christian ideas about the fate of mutilated bodies at the Day of Judgement.[66] In the early modern period there were lengthy debates about what happened to those who had been eaten by cannibals or devoured by beasts and fishes. They were a more rarefied version of the classic old-style pub debate about whether a man with one leg would have the other one restored in the afterlife. The comforting orthodox theological view was that God would reunite every particle of each body with its soul, and therefore the resurrected body would be identical to the complete body of the deceased. Some argued further that the resurrected would be free from all imperfections. Either way, from this theological perspective there would be no headless men and women at the Day of Judgement. Still, these musings do not take us much further. We should focus not on the ghostly body, perhaps, but on what the missing head symbolised. One Jungian psychologist, basing her analysis on Swiss ghost-sightings in the 1950s, suggested that headless ghosts were the unconscious ideation of the moral penalty meted out to those who had committed a terrible crime while alive – the loss of personality, the 'highest value attainable in life'.[67] But this explanation does not apply to most of the English headless ghost sightings and legends, which do not concern murderers or other heinous criminals. Working on a similar level of abstraction the folklorist Theo Brown suggested the headless ghost implied 'the shadow of that earthbound side of humanity left stranded without its informing spiritual centre'.[68] A more explicit construction of the same idea would be that the headless ghost was a cultural echo of the pre-Christian pagan belief that the soul was located in the head, and that at death the head was symbolically separated as the soul departs. Only the ghostly body returned as a spiritual memory. Such speculations, while fascinating, still tell us little about the meaning of the headless ghost in the early modern and modern periods. It remains an enigmatic recurring motif.

INVISIBLE GHOSTS

Many reported ghosts over the centuries were not visible; their presence and sometimes their identity were revealed through the stimulation of senses other than sight. In late nineteenth and twentieth century studies there are numerous accounts of people feeling an indefinable sensation of a presence, which is sometimes connected with a perceived drop in temperature.[69] Sometimes this feeling heralds an apparition and other times it constitutes the entire haunting episode. The experience does not necessarily cause unease. In those cases where it is connected with the bereavement process it can evidently be a comforting feeling.[70] Considering the psychological and environmental basis for the sensation, it is likely that it is neither culturally nor historically exclusive.

Sometimes the presence of a ghost was beyond the detection of human senses. It was a long-held belief that flames turned blue when spirits were around. There is a reference to the notion in *Richard III*, when the king observes, 'The lights burn blue', heralding the appearance of a succession of ghosts. A pamphlet of 1673 recounting the recent appearance of a female ghost at a house in Deptford noted that its presence 'caused the Lights of two Candles that were burning, to be almost extinguished, and burn blue'.[71] Daniel Defoe gave some consideration to the reality of the matter, including a long account of how a London dinner party was thrown into pandemonium when the candles burned blue. A servant seeing this ominous sign fearfully exclaimed, 'I think the Devil is in the Candles to Night', thereby frightening the wits out of the ladies present.[72] The idea that animals have a greater sensitivity to spirits than humans is also venerable and widespread.[73] There are numerous examples in the English records. Baxter recounted the case of a mastiff that awakened a household with its howling having sensed a ghost outside. Francis Grose noted that dogs had a greater faculty for seeing ghosts, showing 'signs of terror, by whining and creeping'. In the nineteenth century an 'eminently unsuperstitious' farmer told Henry Cowper that his cattle and horses became remarkably frightened when they passed near a haunted spot at Hawkshead poor house.[74]

Returning to less refined human senses, people occasionally claimed to have smelt the spirits of the dead. Early modern pamphlets sometimes reported that troublesome ghosts left behind the sulphurous smell of brimstone. A seventeenth-century gentlewoman whose bedroom was haunted smelt an even fouler odour. The ghost or spirit left an 'impression on the Bed, as if some Body had been lying there, and opening the Bed, she smelt the smell of a Carcase some-while dead'.[75] However, such stenches suggested the whiff of the demonic rather than the dearly departed, indicating that they either

emanated from the spirits of the dead who had journeyed from purgatory or hell, or were evil spirits masquerading as ghosts. Less obnoxious but unidentifiable spirit odours were even more of a puzzle. John Aubrey recorded an apparition seen not far from Cirencester in 1670, which, when being asked whether it was a good or bad spirit, 'returned no answer, but disappeared with a curious Perfume and a most melodious Twang'. Whether it was a ghost was debatable, and Aubrey noted that the astrologer William Lilly decided it was a fairy.[76] While evil smells clung to evil spirits, so in Christian hagiography angels and saints exuded sweet fragrances.[77] One might expect to find that a little of this perfume rubbed off on ghosts from heaven, but descriptions of ghost odour are rare until the evidential material produced by spiritualism. The latter development may explain the popularity of noxious and perfumed ghosts in Victorian and Edwardian ghost literature. In Wilkie Collins's short novel *The Haunted Hotel* (1878) a playwright who is planning to write a ghost drama remarks to himself, 'a terrible smell from an invisible ghost is a perfectly new idea. But it has one drawback. If I realise it on stage, I shall drive the audience out of the theatre.'[78] In the twentieth century there is more reported evidence of ghosts revealing their presence by smell, but still only in a small minority of cases. Green and McCreery found that 8 per cent of their respondents reported odours associated with apparitions.[79] As recent interviews with the bereaved indicate, ghosts were more likely to exude mundane scents which people intimately associated with their loved ones. One woman said she could feel her deceased husband's presence and smell the cigarettes he used to smoke. Another woman once felt her husband's presence by the manifestation of the odour of the muscle rub he used regularly.[80]

Invisible ghosts were more frequently heard than smelt. Noises resulting from violent or aggressive actions, such as slamming doors, or knocking on walls, were usually associated with poltergeists, and will be discussed later in this chapter. In the past, passive auditory ghosts were generally identifiable by the repetitive actions that the living were associated with in life. Most common was the sound of footsteps but others were manifested by occupational sounds. A man of Longtown, Herefordshire, reported how he heard the ghost of a hurdle-maker: 'you could hear him tap, tap, tap, choppin' wood for his hurdles all about the place where he was used to work'.[81] Similarly, in the 1930s in the village of Berwick St James, Wiltshire, the former site of a carpenter's workshop was haunted by the tapping noise of the carpenter's hammer.[82] In November 1847, work on the Lancashire, Cheshire and Birkenhead Railway was halted after a man was crushed by a tunnel collapse near Stockham. When workers resumed work, for several days they heard the sound of a pickaxe emanating from the spot where the worker had been killed. It was concluded

that it must be the ghost of the man, a belief that was confirmed when one of the navvies was lowered into the tunnel and emerged swearing that he had seen the white figure of the dead man working away. Subsequent investigation revealed the ghost was merely a tin powder can being blown against rocks by high winds.[83]

The rustle of silk was a more frequently reported auditory sign of a ghostly presence, usually defining both the gender and social status of the ghost. Silk was not a fabric worn by the poor. During the haunting of Mr Mompesson's house in Tedworth, Wiltshire, in 1662–63, a member of the household 'heard a rusling noise in his Chamber, and something came to his Bedside, as if it had been one in silk', while another heard an invisible entity enter room that 'rusled as if it had been in silk'.[84] An elderly Oxford man recalled of his encounter with a ghost in 1894: 'the ghost was that of a tall woman dressed in silk', for he 'heard the rustling of the dress'. Quite a few such cases were also reported to the SPR.[85] Even when the rustling accompanied visual apparitions one gets the impression that it was sometimes the sound that enabled the percipient to characterise the apparel and identity of the ghost. Consider, for example, the experience of a Wiltshire man who told a folklorist in 1894 that he was walking along on the local turnpike road – in reality a highly unusual place to encounter a well-to-do woman walking in silk – when a tall lady dressed in silk 'rustled past'.[86]

SPEECH

Francis Grose noted the tradition that 'a ghost has not the power to speak till it has been first spoken to'. This had to be done in a prescribed way, 'commanding it, in the name of the Three Persons of the Trinity, to tell you who it is, and what is its business'. Once it began to speak it was dangerous to interrupt or ask questions.[87] But, in general, ghosts were reluctant speakers and, as we shall see in a later chapter, the representation of the dumb ghost pointing at some malefactor or guilty person became a stereotypical representation on the stage. In the early modern period vocal ghosts were not rare, but during the nineteenth century they lost their voices to a considerable degree and by the 1970s ghosts were decidedly taciturn. Green and McCreery's survey found that only 14 per cent of all human apparitions spoke, noting that 'few speak at length, and the speaking is not always realistic'.[88] A similar comment was made back in 1681 regarding a ghost that made some physical contact, but could not speak beyond a whisper despite much earnest human beseeching:

> This troublesome Spirit I suspect to have been the Ghost of some party deceased who would have uttered something, but had not the knack of speaking so articulately as to be understood. And when they can speak intelligibly, it is ordinarily in a hoarse and low Voice, as is observable in many stories.[89]

In the past, when ghosts did speak it was certainly not for idle chit-chat or to discourse at length on the nature of the afterlife. If they did more than repeat one's name three times and groan, it was because they had urgent news or instruction to impart, which could not be divulged by gestures alone. The late eighteenth-century occultist Ebenezer Sibly believed that only the spirits of those who had been murdered under 'circumstances uncommonly horrid and execrable' were able to speak. This was because the horrific remembrance of the event did 'more powerfully operate upon the faculties of the apparition, as to enable it to frame the similitude of a voice, so as to discover the fact, and give some leading clue to detect and punish the wicked perpetrator'.[90] Sibly was correct in that the most talkative ghosts were usually of those who had died a terrible death, but the need to right other wrongs, such as inheritance disputes or hidden goods also sometimes required a conversation.

The question of how exactly ghosts spoke without having physical organs has long been considered. There are several medieval accounts of ghosts deigning to explain to the living the nature of their vocal capacities. The response of two of them that they spoke from their guts and not their mouths hardly solved the matter, though it helped explain how headless ghosts sometimes talked. Another replied more convincingly that the power of speech lay in the soul and not the tongue.[91] In the early eighteenth century *Aristotle's New Book of Problems* plumped for a Neoplatonic scientific solution. As aerial beings, ghosts had command of the movement of air, and since sound was transmitted by percussion, 'they assume a Voice by beating on the Air, and so frame Sounds, as to be understood of us in any Language they shall please'.[92] The following century, the author Catherine Crowe, borrowing from contemporary theories of mesmerism and clairvoyance, argued that, 'in cases where speech appears to be used by a spirit, it is frequently not audible speech, but only this transference of thought, which appears to be speech from the manner in which the thought is borne in and enters the mind of the receiver; but it is not through his ears'.[93]

TOUCHING ENCOUNTERS

It has already been observed that ghosts commonly respected physical objects rather than walk through them, but that is not to say that they could not. It

was their ethereal lightness that enabled them to travel through the air. Glanvill provided an account of a female ghost in which a man stated that 'If a Tree stood in her walk, he observed her always to go through it.' On one occasion the ghost requested that the man lift her up, and he reported that 'She felt just like a bag of Feathers in his arms.'[94] This was fascinating detail for Glanvill because he was engaged in a more general debate with contemporaries about the nature of heavenly substance. Over the centuries the touch of ghosts has usually been described as cold. A seventeenth-century pamphlet told how a female ghost placed a finger that 'seemed to be very cold' on a lodger in a Deptford inn. In the same period a gentlewoman visited repeatedly by a ghost described how she felt it 'cold and very smooth', and another woman who was touched by her deceased mistress affirmed her hand 'was as cold as a Clod'.[95] This was presumably explained away as representing the temperature of corpses, but it is worth noting that the touch of the Devil was also said to be icy.

Ghosts rarely applied much pressure to the flesh of the living, usually merely brushing past or giving a gentle prod or embrace. The gentlewoman mentioned above described it as like 'a cold blast or puff of Wind'. Occasionally, though, they liked to throw what weight they had around. Samuel Wesley, father of John Wesley, described how during the haunting of the family home at Epworth in 1716–17, he had 'been thrice pushed by an invisible power, once against the corner of my desk in the study, a second time against the door of the matter chamber, a third time against the right side of the frame of my study door, as I was going in'.[96] In 1802 a spirit haunting a house near Cambridge took a particular dislike to people's clothing. The case was recorded in a letter from Benjamin Smith, then a student, to his father the Nonconformist and politician William Smith (1756–1835). For two weeks past, wrote Smith, a 'ghost' had plagued the house of a tanner, ripping to shreds the clothes of its inhabitants: '18 or 20 of the neighbours, who went in to examine, were served by the spirit just the same way. – multitudes of people soon flocked from all quarters to have their clothes spoilt, and all went away satisfied and in rags'. A local doctor launched an investigation but no evidence of fraud was found. Smith was satisfied that the reality of the spirit manifestation was 'beyond the possibility of doubt.'[97] In recent decades some people have claimed to be sexually assaulted by ghosts, but such instances are rare in the historical record.[98] The sensation of nocturnal molestation was usually attributed to the Devil or witches, and some cases were certainly the result of a condition known as sleep paralysis, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

The actions of aggressive invisible forces take us into the realm of the obstreperous poltergeist, where the boundaries between the activities of devils, witches and ghosts become blurred.[99] The term 'poltergeist', meaning 'noisy

ghost', was first used in print by Martin Luther (1483–1546), but it only entered English vocabulary during the nineteenth century when Catherine Crowe referred to the poltergeists of the Germans in her compendium of ghost stories *The Night-Side of Nature* (1848).[100] It was the psychic investigator Harry Price (1881–1948) who then popularised the term and the phenomena in the twentieth century through his public investigations and publications. Poltergeist activity, which was nearly always associated with the haunting of buildings, typically consisted of the throwing or moving of objects, the slamming of doors, the rattling of windows, and the rapping on walls and furniture. Occasionally spirits would communicate through such knocking. Sometimes they pushed, pinched and bruised people. As one nineteenth-century study of ghosts astutely observed, 'a ghost's power of making a noise, and exerting what seems to be great physical energy, is often in inverse ratio to his power of making himself generally visible, or, at all events, to his inclination so to do'.[101]

Stone-throwing or lithobolia, as such spirit activity was called by one seventeenth-century pamphleteer,[102] was a particularly common feature of historic poltergeist activity. Richard Baxter reported the case of a house in Lutterworth plagued by stones for several weeks in February 1646. Large crowds gathered to see the mystery but 'no search could discover any fraud'.[103] John Beaumont, writing in 1705, recounted a similar instance that had occurred recently at the house of a Mr Pope of Butley, in Somerset. Pope's adolescent son suffered from recurring fits during which he said he saw spirits that threatened to burn the house down. For days stones were thrown through windows, 'no Man perceiving from what Hand they came', until the day when the house and oxen stall were set on fire.[104] Through rumour and gossip, the act of stone-throwing, if continued for long enough without detection, could accrue supernatural associations that were not present in the first place. In the Lutterworth case mentioned above, Baxter reported that the stone-thrower also targeted the crowds that gathered, but, strange to say, the stones 'hit them, but hurt them not'. The *West Briton* newspaper, reporting on a stone-thrower who targeted a military depot in Truro in April 1821, patronisingly observed that 'The lower classes, who have always a taste for the marvellous, are fully persuaded that this is a supernatural visitation by some troubled spirit, and numberless tales of the most extravagant nature have been circulated.' These included assertions by some that the stones smelt of brimstone and that they continued to rain down in rooms even though the windows and doors were shut.[105]

The haunting of the Wesley's home, which is now usually referred to as the 'Epworth Poltergeist', demonstrates well the fact that up until the nineteenth century in urban areas, and the twentieth century nationally, such

noisy manifestations were not commonly blamed on ghosts. Emily Wesley believed the spirit, which they called 'Old Jeffrey', was the work of witches or an act of magical spite by local cunning-folk. Her father Samuel called it a 'deaf and dumb devil'. No one mentioned spirits of the dead. In other poltergeist cases the usual popular cultural explanation was witchcraft, while the puritanical and evangelical were quick to blame aggressive hauntings on obsession, in other words the external molestation of a person or persons by the Devil. The decision-making of the Independent minister Vavasor Powell (1617–1670) is a good case in point. He recalled being at prayer one night in his chamber when

> suddain I heard one walk about me, trampling upon the Chamber floor, as if it had been some heavie big man, upon which I grew so fearful, and unbelieving, that I ran down shutting, and hasping the door after me, and called up some of the family, telling them there was a thief in the room, but it proved in the end, to be no other than that spiritual thief, and murderer Satan.[106]

GHOSTS WITH NO SOUL?

In some hauntings ghosts appeared in inextricable association with equally apparitional inanimate objects, such as phantom coaches, ships and more recently cars. But if ghosts were the spirits of the dead how could such inanimate objects also be spirits? For some this was a pointless, ridiculous question that demonstrated the absurdity of the belief in ghosts. But one man, at least, attempted to construct a spiritual rationale for their existence. In his *Spirit World: Its Inhabitants, Nature and Philosophy*, published in 1879, the American spiritualist Eugene Crowell argued that phantom ships and spectral railway trains were not myths. They were the earthly creations of the ghosts of mariners and railwaymen, constructed from spiritual substances gathered from the heavens. He hastened to point out that permission to carry out such spiritual manufacturing was only granted 'to such spirits as have reformed, or have not led abandoned lives'. By building their own ships the ghosts of mariners who yearned for the sea were able to voyage the oceans once again and visit ports just as they had done in life. The ships 'glide over the waves without sinking into them', Crowell explained, 'and earthly winds propel them at rates of speed which our ships cannot attain'.[107]

What serious debate there was on the issue of ghostly inanimate objects focused primarily on the matter of clothing. That ghosts appeared in dress,

armour or in winding sheets was one of the favourite rationalist arguments *against* their existence over the centuries. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes raised the point in 1651 when he queried how 'Ghosts of men (and I may adde of their clothes which they appear in) can walk by night in Churches, Churchyards, and other places of Sepulture.'[108] In 1762, the author of *Anti-Canidia*, a rationalist attack on supernatural belief, pondered, 'how is a spirit, in itself immaterial and invisible, to become the object of human sight? How is it to acquire the appearance of *dress*?'[109] A century later another critic mocked, 'how do you account for the ghosts' clothes – are they ghosts, too?' 'What an idea, indeed!' He exclaimed.

> All the socks that never came home from the wash, all the boots and shoes which we left behind us worn out at watering-places, all the old hats which we gave to crossing-sweepers … What a notion of heaven – an illimitable old clothes-shop, peopled by bores, and not a little infested with knaves![110]

That the issue was also debated widely outside the literary sphere is indicated by the editor of the *Occult Review*. In 1906 he wearily commented, 'I am not unfamiliar with the criticism. Indeed, it comes to me reminiscent of early school days and of debates on the subject in school debating societies.'[111]

In the early modern period answers to the clothing conundrum were not forthcoming from the ghost believers. Maybe it was felt there was no need. God worked in mysterious ways. The theories of mesmerism, hypnotism and clairvoyance that circulated in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century England provided pseudo-scientific theories to bolster the faith position. If the living had telepathic powers perhaps the sentient souls of the dead could also transmit thoughts and images into the minds of the earthbound. The spirits did not necessarily physically appear but they could impress their physical identity upon the minds of the living, and therefore the imagination of the clairvoyant. Catherine Crowe, whose book of hauntings and apparitions went through numerous editions following its initial publication in 1848, applied this theory to the ghost clothes issue. If a spirit could 'conceive of its former body it can equally conceive of its former habiliments, and so represent them, by the power of will to the eye, or present them to the constructive imagination of the seer'. As to their reason for choosing to appear clothed, they were naturally the same as for wearing clothes in life. To appear naked, 'to say the least of it, would be much more frightful and shocking'.[112] As others argued, ghosts obviously did not need clothing to keep them warm or attract the opposite sex. Clothes were also about personal and social identity. In 1851 Alfred Roffe observed that those who held up clothes as proof against ghosts 'never seem

to consider, that even in the Natural World, Men do not use Clothing merely for Decency and Defence … Clothing is used also for its beauty, and above all, for its great significancy.'[113] The same point was reinforced in a debate on the subject in the pages of the *Occult Review*. A ghost, wrote one correspondent, wore clothes 'to identify himself with the position and period of his earthly life'.[114] The argument had a sound internal logic. How could one make sense, otherwise, of a naked headless ghost? A disturbing thought both in the past and present.

ANIMALS

Only a very small proportion of the apparitions reported to the SPR and Green and McCreery were of animals. Most reports concerned cats and dogs, which is not surprising considering they are the animals most associated with human companionship.[115] The surveys also confirm what is apparent from the historical sources, that only a very small number of apparitions were those of identifiable pets. Likewise there are few examples of animal ghosts verifiable by known deaths, such as that of a dog seen on Bengeo Common in Hertfordshire in March 1877. As a local newspaper reported, it was thought to be the ghost of a dog that had been killed three weeks before. It was reddish in colour – 'so far as can be seen at night, for it has not been seen in the day time'.[116] Unlike cat and dog apparitions, those of horses, which were common enough, usually appeared in association with human ghosts, pulling phantom carriages or carrying headless horsemen. Otherwise there have been reports of diverse other animals over the centuries including bears, calves, deer and rabbits.[117]

We have to be careful with terminology here, because it is unclear from modern and historic sources as to what extent people believed that the spirit animals they saw *were* ghosts – in other words the souls of the deceased. The issue of whether animals have souls, and, if they do, what type of soul, has long been and continues to be a matter of Christian debate in both Catholic and Protestant churches. An English survey conducted in the 1990s revealed that 77 per cent of people thought that animals had souls, with 56 per cent believing they had an afterlife.[118] From a theological point of view, of course, the reality of animal *ghosts* could be interpreted as confirmation that the souls of animals are immortal, but this was hardly an orthodox position in medieval and early modern England. It was widely accepted that animals possessed spiritual souls; some suggested immortal ones, but few, other than political radicals during the Civil War and some evangelicals, argued that they had rational souls or shared an afterlife with humankind.[119] In the seventeenth century

the French philosopher Descartes, who rejected entirely the idea that animals had a spiritual soul, though he conceded it might be corporeal, reinvigorated the debate. However, his idea that animals were merely machines was not widely adopted in England. Following the publication of a popular edition of Descartes's work in 1694, the issue was at least widely debated in the press, with contributions from the main essayists of the day such as Defoe, Pope, Addison and Swift. Even in this Enlightenment discourse, there was no consensus on the issue. Some continued to assert that animals had immaterial and immortal souls, while the odd voice even suggested that animals joined humans at the Day of Judgement.[120] It is important to stress, though, that the debate regarding animal souls was conducted separately from that of ghosts, and that there was no conflict between adhering to the concept of their immortality and rejecting the notion of the return of the spirits of the dead.

In popular culture right through until the twentieth century there were several alternative explanations for such sightings. Witches, fairies, angels and devils were all believed to transform themselves into animals, and witches were also thought to have animal familiars. Up until the late nineteenth century most animal apparitions seem to have been interpreted in these contexts, and could be distinguished by their unnatural features, which were more demonic than ghostly. They were sometimes said to be bigger than normal animals, while others were indefinable animal forms. Some were headless. Many possessed abnormally large fiery eyes, often described as being as 'big as saucers'. A good example of this type of spirit beast was that seen in January 1878 by the inhabitants of Baldock, Hertfordshire. Large numbers gathered nightly to witness the haunting of a house at the top of the high street, causing Police Constable William Tripp some trouble in keeping the road open to traffic. Windows and doors banged open and beds were lifted up. This disruptive ghost was described as a 'small white animal, with eyes as large as saucers' and was seen by both day and night.[121] Many of the local legends of black dogs that have been recorded over the centuries fit this mould of spirit being.[122]

In early modern accounts, black dog spirits were usually overtly diabolic. Pamphlets told of a sulphurous-smelling, headless black bear that manhandled a Somerset woman in 1584, and a large, coal-coloured dog that haunted and disrupted the house of an Oxfordshire gentleman in 1591–92. Proof that such incidents were played out in the popular mind of the period, and not just on the printed page, is apparent from the casebooks of Elizabethan and Jacobean astrologers and physicians. One man who consulted Richard Napier described how the Devil appeared to him in the form of a black dog and a bear.[123] Richard Boulton, who, in the early eighteenth century, wrote one of the last intellectual defences of the belief in witchcraft, asserted that the

Devil appeared 'in divers Shapes, not only of those who are alive, but also of dead Men, or in the form of Beasts and Birds, he sometimes appearing in the Likeness of a black Dog'. His assertion was based primarily on the evidence of the witch trials of the previous century. In 1664, for instance, Elizabeth Styles confessed to a Somerset magistrate that around ten years before, the Devil had appeared to her in the form of a handsome man and a black dog.[124] But as a recent overview of the black dog tradition confirms, by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the demonic traits of such animal apparitions had dwindled, just as encounters with the physical Devil dropped out of popular legends and memorates. Dog apparitions were no longer figures of fear and dread but rather subjects of curiosity and wonder. They began to take on more of the characteristics of human ghosts.[125] This is exemplified by the generation of stories of ghostly dogs haunting the spots where their deceased masters or mistresses had last been seen or murdered. The dog ghost on Bengeo Common was, perhaps, a product of its time.

As the discussion above suggests, there is little evidence for people believing in animal ghosts prior to the late nineteenth century. However there is another intriguing, and long-held popular tradition that *human* ghosts, as well as devils, fairies and witches could shape-shift and appear in animal form. Eighteenth-century rationalists singled out the belief for particular mockery. Writing in 1720, the satirical, anti-clerical writer Thomas Gordon divided ghosts into two kinds. One was the 'ghost of dignity', which represented 'in every respect' the same person as he or she was in life, and inhabited their own house or rattled around in their coach and six. The 'plebeian ghost', on the other hand, rarely appeared in its 'bodily likeness'. It 'humbly contents itself with the Body of a white Horse, that gallops over the Meadows without Legs, and grazes in them without a head. On other Occasions it wears the Carcass of a great black Dog, that glares full in your Face.'[126] Several decades later the author of *Anti-Canidia* wondered with considerable disdain how the 'vulgar' could imagine that ghosts appeared 'in variety of shapes; – like a dog, with saucer eyes, for instance, as well as like a human person?'[127]

While such shape-shifting human ghosts appear across the range of relevant sources – trial records, pamphlets and folklore – there is a difference in the way they were represented over time. In seventeenth-century literature they had overtly demonic characteristics. An apparition that plagued the parishioners of Spraiton, Devon, in the early 1680s, appeared sometimes in the form of the deceased wife of a local gentleman and 'now and then, like a monstrous Dog, belching out fire'. Its appearance and behaviour had Richard Bovet calling it both a ghost and a 'She-Dæmon'. An account of a haunting conducted by the ghost of a baker in 1661 described how he appeared in the likeness of a black

cat and a goat as well as in his human form, and also left behind the smell of brimstone. In another pamphlet published in 1679 the appearance of the ghost of a young man of Stamford, who was murdered on the orders of his brother, was said to have 'changed itself into more fearful formes, as a Bear, a Lion, and the like with Gastly countenance, and horrid Eyes, oft sparkling fire'.[128]

Turning to nineteenth-century folkloric sources, however, we find few diabolic connotations. Apparitions of animals, usually of a more gentle persuasion, and with few if any abnormalities, were thought to haunt the spots where people died in terrible circumstances. At Wheal Vor Mine, Cornwall, the place where several miners were blown to pieces by an explosion was afterwards said to be haunted by a troop of little black dogs. The ghosts of those murdered in and around Corby were sometimes seen crossing Highstane Common, Bewcastle, in various forms including a drove of black cattle or a herd of wild horses. In early nineteenth-century Oxfordshire the spirits of suicides buried at Cowleas Corner haunted the spot in animal forms such as calves and sheep.[129] The ghost of another suicide, a farmer of Weobley, Herefordshire, was also seen in the form of a calf, while the Lincolnshire diarist Henry Winn recorded in the 1840s that a place near Fulletby was haunted by the ghost of a girl in the form of a white rabbit. She had supposedly died on the spot in 1766, after falling from her horse.[130] The Radical politician Samuel Bamford (1788–1872) recalled an old house at Stanicliffe, near Middleton, where, during the Civil War period, a man was shot dead by the fearsomely tempered servant of the local important family:

> Ever after, until a comparatively recent date, the house and premises he occupied were haunted by 'fyerin' (boggarts or apparitions) which came sometimes in the form of a calf, sometimes in that of a huge black dog, and sometimes in the human form, but hideous and terrible.[131]

The Lincolnshire folklorist Mabel Peacock was unable to get a clear opinion as to whether such animal apparitions were popularly thought to be the victims in animal guise or demons who liked to frequent spots where terrible acts occurred. After 'some consideration I have come to the conclusion that they are probably the former', she wrote.[132]

It is tempting to interpret this tradition of shape-shifting ghosts as an extraordinary remnant of animistic, pagan shamanic belief, but as the medievalist Jean-Claude Schmitt has cautioned, there is also a Christian tradition of pictorially representing souls in animal form.[133] The concept is also evident in medieval ecclesiastical literature, where the souls of angels and dying saints assumed the form of a dove, while the saints in heaven sometimes came to

the aid of their future peers in the form of an eagle. However, examples of the souls of lesser humans appearing in animal form are rare.[134] The cases of shape-shifting human ghosts reported by a Cistercian monk in Yorkshire, around 1400, are unusual. In one instance a dead person appeared in the form of a haystack and a horse, while another was seen in the guise of a crow, a dog and a goat. There is some evidence from the early modern period that angels were popularly thought to appear on earth on animal forms, usually as birds or bird-like forms.[135] So it is possible that the human-animal ghost derives from Christian symbolism, though the notion that it is an archaic survival of pre-Christian belief should not be discarded.

Whether the shape-shifting ghost became less demonic during the modern period is debatable. It is possible that the gentler nineteenth-century version existed in early modern folklore as well. The seventeenth-century pamphlet literature, influenced by the educated preoccupation with the Devil, may distort our understanding, presenting us with a demonic conception of ghosts that did not reflect popular beliefs. Then again, witchcraft historians, using trial records, have shown how, due to the influence of the clergy and pamphlets spreading the idea of satanic witchcraft, the witch's familiar became more overtly diabolic in popular belief during the seventeenth century. Once witchcraft was no longer an educated concern, and the common people were no longer being inculcated with the notion of the witches' pact, the demonic aspects of familiars faded. In nineteenth-century folklore they are usually represented as simple domestic creatures once again.[136] A similar process could have occurred with the shape-shifting ghost, and so Bamford's boggarts may have been a remnant of the early modern demonising of crime.

THE SHELF LIFE OF GHOSTS

How long do ghosts last? Certainly no more than 2,000 years it would seem. Until recently there were no sightings of the ghosts of prehistoric people; no Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers roaming the landscape; no Bronze Age spirits hanging about tumuli or Iron Age phantoms patrolling hill forts. Why should there be limits on the age of hauntings?

In the medieval period, as Jean-Claude Schmitt has observed, 'the time of ghosts was the time of living memory'.[137] Ghosts appeared shortly after death, and even reported to their human interlocutors how many days or months had passed since their existence. The length of time between appearances was often dependent on the length and procedure of the programmes of intercessionary prayers and masses that were employed to speed the passage of souls through

purgatory. This in turn obviously depended on the wealth of the deceased and their families. The commonest request from those with a bit of money was the trental, which consisted of a set of 30 requiem masses, usually said over 30 days, though it could be compressed into a week if the family had sufficient funds to employ a marathon relay of priests. Considering how much money was involved servicing purgatorial souls, the church was understandably flexible about the nature and length of the intercessionary services they offered. In 1546, for example, One William Crofts, of Bolsover, bequeathed that 100 shillings be paid to a priest to have him sing for his soul for a year after his death.[138] Sometimes masses were spread over several years. Whatever the arrangement, it was considered reasonable that the restless spirits of the dead might return periodically to remind or encourage those praying for their souls, with an appreciative parting visit at the end to mark the completion of their time in purgatory.

In the early modern period, limits were put on the existence of ghosts depending on various scientific and metaphysical criteria that will be discussed in subsequent chapters. In the sixteenth century, for instance, it was stated that according to some necromantic magicians the spirits of the dead could only be recalled to the body within one year of death.[139] Some scientists argued that the spirits of the dead created their visual forms from the moisture of their former earthly bodies, and so they could no longer appear once the corpses they were spiritually attached to desiccated.[140] For the same reason, a similar timescale was suggested by those who argued that ghosts were merely simulacra generated from vapours arising from decomposing corpses rather than the spirits of the dead.

Purposeful ghosts continued to appear and disappear as before in post-Reformation England, and were particularly prominent in the literature of the seventeenth century. Many of the accounts in the collections of Glanvill, Baxter, Sinclair and Aubrey concern ghosts that appeared shortly after death to friends and family, while those that hung around for longer were usually waiting for someone to facilitate their mission. This did not usually take long, though there were some exceptions. A pamphlet published around 1675 reported that a ghost had recently appeared to one William Clark, a maltster living near Northampton, and stated:

> I am the disturbed Spirit of a person long since Dead, I was Murthered neer this place Two hundred sixty and seven years, nine weeks, and two days ago, to this very time, and come along with me and I will shew you where it was done.[141]

The Reformation ensured that purgatorial parameters were no longer relevant, however, and maybe this slowly but surely freed the constraints on ghostly sojourns in popular tradition. The ethnographic evidence for popular beliefs from the eighteenth century onwards suggests that certain types of ghost were appearing for longer and longer periods. These were not the purposeful ghosts that interacted with humans, but the hordes of silent memorial ghosts who walked the roads, roamed the fields or lingered by pools, sometimes haunting the spot where a person committed suicide, perhaps commemorating a sad event or merely a repetitive action. The lifespan of such ghosts, for which there was no obvious allotted occupancy on earth, depended on the collective memory and the stability of the oral transmission of local histories in communities from one generation to the next.

A ghost needed to be located in time to make sense of it. This could be achieved by matching a haunting with a real event such as a murder or a suicide. This could be a recent incident fresh in the collective or individual memory, or it could be associated with a dim and distant tragic event. Legends could be appropriated to give a ghost a back-story. Sometimes the location of a haunting provided the dating evidence. A ghost in a castle could be confidently located in medieval or early modern times. The building's physical state, whether it was in ruins or not, could further narrow down the date range. Ghosts, as troubled spirits, also became explicable if they could be situated in a turbulent period of history such as the dissolution of the monasteries. Ghostly nuns and monks are common in folklore sources. To give but two examples, near Tong, Shropshire, in the 1930s, a nun haunted the former sight of a nunnery dissolved during the Reformation.[142] The ghost of an abbot haunted Buckfast Abbey, Devon, for 300 years, but was apparently assuaged in the 1920s by the building of a Catholic chapel on the site.[143] The Civil War was another tumultuous period, strong in the collective memory and popular literature, and consequently numerous historic ghosts are dated to this conflict. Samuel Bamford (1788–1872) recalled how, in his childhood, School Lane in Middleton, Lancashire, was haunted by two men, one Royalist and the other a Roundhead, who killed each other there during the Civil War.[144] A Roundhead haunted Heath House in Shropshire, while the ghost of a Dutch officer who fought in the Civil War haunted a Shrewsbury inn until the 1970s.[145] It is clothing that enables people to date the age of such ghosts. The ubiquity of ghostly nuns, monks, Roundheads and Cavaliers is due considerably to the fact that they are easily recognisable by their habits and headgear. So clothes identify the period and the period provides the reason for the haunting.

To a large extent, then, people's perception of historic ghosts depended on their sense and knowledge of history. But this is an extremely difficult thing to gauge. Prior to the advent of compulsory mass education in the second half of the nineteenth century, most people's idea of the past was built on orally transmitted traditions passed down through families and communities, and, from the seventeenth century onwards, the tales of past events found in popular literature, such as ballads, chapbooks and almanacs.[146] There was certainly little conception of prehistory as we know it today, and the various visible remains of our ancient landscape, such as Neolithic and Bronze Age ritual and burial monuments, were popularly interpreted as the work of the Devil, or of giants and fairies from an indeterminate distant past.[147] During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the furthest back that most people's sense of English history extended was the Viking invasions and settlement from the ninth century. Educated and popular publications of the time generated a strong popular patriotic sense of the English resistance to the 'Danish yoke'. Numerous local legends of valiant battles against the Danes sprang up around the country, with some enduring right through into the twentieth century, perhaps given renewed life by the national celebration of King Alfred in 1901, to mark the 1,000th anniversary of his death.[148] It is quite likely, as a consequence, that tales of the ghostly appearance of Danish and English soldiers were common at the time. But significant insights into popular beliefs in ghosts only become available from the late seventeenth century, and by this time the chronological parameters of popular history had shifted to more recent events. The Civil War had become the most prominent episode in English legendary history, smothering and replacing earlier traditions of Old English battles and monumental destruction. Oliver Cromwell 'was here' became part of the topography of many communities, while confusion with Thomas Cromwell and his role in the dissolution of the monasteries helped perpetuate the earlier folk memory of the Reformation.[149]

There is also a regional angle to this history of popular historical tradition and ghosts. In the West Country, for example, the Monmouth rebellion of 1685 and the infamous Bloody Assizes held by Judge Jeffreys became a strong legendary influence. As one Victorian folklorist noted, 'Even as far west as Lydford Castle the ghost of Judge Jeffrey is said to still frighten timid children and old women.'[150] Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859) wrote in his famous *History of England* that his own childhood recollections testified to the fact that in Somerset 'many tales of terror' about the events were told over Christmas fires over a century after the rebellion. 'Within the last forty years,' he said, referring to the execution of the rebels, 'peasants, in some districts well knew the accursed spots, and passed them unwillingly after sunset.'[151]

The focus on such events was further reinforced by the popular histories that formed part of the Victorian school curriculum. The Reformation was obviously held up as a key moment in English historical progress, though some pedagogic texts recognised the brutality of the Dissolution. Similarly, the Civil War and the execution of Charles I was used to defend the righteousness of monarchy and the iniquity of political rebellion.[152] Considering the emphasis on these events it is no wonder that during the early twentieth century ghosts continued to conform to the preoccupation with these periods. The influence of popular education in creating stereotypical ages of haunting is apparent from the antiquarian Henry Swainson Cowper's debunking of the Lake District legend of the 'Crier of Claife'. This ghost supposedly scared the ferrymen of the lakes around the time of the Reformation, until a monk vanquished it. Cowper pointed out the basic historical and geographical errors in the story, as told by several writers such as Harriet Martineau in her *Guide to the Lake District* (1858), and suggested that the compilers of the story 'muddled wilfully or by accident' several traditions. Writing in 1899, Cowper concluded that 'The fact that the country people now know the story, is worthless as evidence, since it has been repeated by guide book after guide book for at least thirty years.'[153]

The most recent addition to the corpus of heritage hauntings is also the most venerable of all – the roman legionnaire. A search on the internet reveals numerous sightings in diverse places such as London, Derby, the Isle of Wight, and an old Roman road near Weymouth. Some readers will be familiar with the well-known case of a troop of soldiers seen by a plumber working in a York cellar in 1953. However, such sightings are a modern phenomenon, with nearly all of them dating to the last 50 years. The earliest reports I have found concern a Roman centurion seen patrolling the Strood, Mersea Island, which was first recorded in 1904, and a ghostly Roman army that marched on certain nights along Bindon Hill, Dorset, to their camp on Ring's Hill during the 1930s.[154] Distinguishing between the ghost of a Bronze Age warrior and an Iron Age one would be a task for an archaeologist, but thanks to 'swords and sandals' film epics, and the inclusion of the Roman invasion in school curricula, the dress of the roman soldier has become as recognisable as that of a monk or a cavalier. Clothes truly maketh the ghost.

FRIGHTENED TO DEATH

For some, seeing a ghost was a matter of life and death in more than just a metaphysical sense. The Rev. E. Gillespy, a Northamptonshire clergyman, wrote in 1793 that 'Nothing can affect the human mind with greater terror, than the

dread of an interview with the souls of deceased persons.'[155] It is still common speech to say to someone 'It looks as though you have seen a ghost', to describe how they appear pale, drawn and shocked. In the past the most characteristic reaction to seeing a ghost was to feel one's hair stand on end. There is a biblical precedent. In Job 4:15, Eliphaz states that when 'a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up'.[156] An eighteenth-century account of a haunting on board a ship bound for New York described how 'a man sprung suddenly upon the deck in his shirt, his hair erect, his eyes starting from their sockets, and uttered, he had seen a ghost'.[157] The eighteenth-century publisher James Lackington experienced another classic symptom. He recalled that on momentarily believing he had seen a ghost as a youth, 'I perceived my hair to heave my hat from my head, and my teeth to chatter in my mouth.'[158] Even more evocative was the reaction to seeing an apparition described by the Welsh Independent minister Edmund Jones (1702–1793): 'his hair moved upon his head, his heart panted and beat violently, his flesh trembled, he felt not his cloaths about him'.[159]

While such imagery provokes a smile, in a popular culture where witchcraft was thought an ever-present threat and spirits roamed the land after dark, people were literally 'frightened to death'. The Hammersmith ghost scare was said to have caused the demise of one woman, and in 1814 the newspapers reported that an aristocratic young woman had died after a convulsive fit brought on by having seen two ghosts in her bedchamber.[160] Of course, such rumours were often nothing more than that, but as inquest records prove, people really did die of fright, though from a modern perspective we would now seek to determine and emphasise the underlying medical causes. In January 1894 an inquest on the body of a 17-year-old servant named Elizabeth Bishop, at Misterton, Somerset, concluded that she had died of excessive fright or syncope. The previous month, the ship *Olive Branch* had sunk and her master's brother, who was captain, had drowned. There was obviously much distress in her master's household in Lyme Regis, and one day when left alone in the house she saw the shadow of a man on some window blinds and thought it was the ghost of the captain. This severely frightened her and in the ensuing weeks she said she had also seen the ghost of a cousin who had been dead some 20 years. In a state of considerable distress she returned home to her parents in Misterton, and shortly after she fell into a terrible fit and died.[161] In March 1841 an inquest on the body of an elderly labourer named Patrick Hayes, who lodged at the Fortune of War in Marsh Street, Bristol, heard how he died from injuries sustained after falling down stairs while under the influence. The landlady, Mary Croker, testified

that she thought he might have seen a ghost that haunted the building. She told the coroner:

> It is the ghost of a lady in silk, and has been troublesome to some former lodgers. Two or three lodgers have been killed in the same house, and no doubt frightened from the same cause. I have never seen the ghost myself.

A verdict of accidental death was given.[162]

Two

The Geography of Haunting

Some ghosts haunted individuals while others haunted places. Wherever humans have been so ghosts have followed: from ships in the middle of the ocean to the crowded streets of London, from the dark depths of the earth to moonlit hilltops, from the humblest cottages to royal palaces. But rarely did ghosts roam or linger aimlessly; there was usually a reason as to *where* as well as *why* they appeared. The spirits of the dead most obviously returned to those places where someone had died or where corpses lay buried or hidden. But there were other locations where ghosts lingered that did not have explicit associations with death, such as bridges, roads and pools. The Rev. John Christopher Atkinson's (1814–1900) recollection of the haunted landscape of his Essex childhood evokes well the traditional range of haunted locations. Ghosts lurked in 'houses, always old and mostly old-fashioned, barns, lanes, the moated sites of old manor-houses, "four-want-ways" or the place of intersection of two cross-roads, churchyards, suicides' graves – which were spoken of, dreaded, avoided after nightfall, as being "haunted"'.[1] One way of encapsulating and trying to understand the significance of this diverse geography of hauntings is to consider them in relation to liminal spaces.

The concept of liminality, which pertains to the state of being on the border or threshold of two defined states of existence, has been most enthusiastically employed by anthropologists to describe the symbolic and physical transitional stages in which initiates find themselves when undergoing rites of passage. But the concept also serves to describe, in various historic and prehistoric contexts, the relationship between life, death, the afterlife, and natural and man-made features in the landscape.[2] Certain physical boundaries, such as Neolithic henges, that prehistoric peoples carved into the landscape can be seen to have much deeper symbolic meaning in terms of the boundaries between the living and dead or the worlds of mortals and gods. Natural features such as rivers likewise served as liminal places where the two worlds met, and where people gathered to either reinforce the separation between them or to try to permeate it briefly for religious or magical purposes. Man-made or

administrative boundaries constructed for pragmatic rather than religious purposes could also assume deeper liminal significance. In Scandinavia, for instance, there was a long association between the living dead and property boundaries. This was ostensibly due to a medieval law that declared that anyone caught moving the stones marking out people's properties would be considered an outlaw. Once dead the outlaw returned to haunt the spot where in life he or she had transgressed secular and religious norms, and could be encountered groaning, trying to move the stone to its rightful place, or pointing out to the living where it should lie.[3] There are some indications that English parish boundaries also functioned as liminal places. The demonic ghost that, in 1682, tormented and abused a man of Spreyton (Spraiton), Devon, only appeared to him as soon as he crossed into the parish. Richard Bovet picked up on this, suggesting, 'it looks as if these spirits were tyed to some limits, or bounds, that they cannot pass'.[4] A study of haunted English roads has also identified that a significant number lie on parish boundaries.[5] Considering that the origins of parish boundaries date to the Anglo-Saxon period, and were delineated by linking up recognisable landscape features such as tracks, burial mounds, river crossings and streams, then some hauntings may have deep symbolic roots in the past.

As well as being sensitive to the significance and meaning of liminality, we should also be aware of how changes in the environment over time influenced the landscape of haunting. One wonders, for example, how parliamentary enclosure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries affected ghost traditions in Midland communities, and likewise how drainage of wetlands influenced hauntings in Somerset and the Fens. One indication of the impact of the latter development on ghost legends is evident from a conversation between a Norfolk woman and the Rev. John Gunn, rector of Irstead, Norfolk. She told him how before the parish had been drained and enclosed in 1810 she had frequently seen a light near a spot called Heard's Holde, where legend had it a man who had committed terrible crimes had drowned. 'I have often seen it there, rising up and falling and twistering about, and then up again. It looked exactly like a candle in a lantern.'[6] How many other such ghosts were extinguished with the receding water?

INSIDE

There is no great mystery as to why buildings should have been so frequently haunted. Whether the dwellers of castles or cottages, manors or hovels, the vast majority of people died inside their homes. It was, therefore, the natural

place for their ghosts to return. It was where people mourned the dead and were surrounded by memories of their presence. For sceptics the house was obviously the centre of hauntings because it was where people slept and dreamed of the dead, or where people lay drunk, drugged or hallucinating in their sickbeds. The theory of ghosts as residual electromagnetic impulses left behind by the strong emotions of the deceased, emphasises the dampness and enclosed environment of buildings required to retain this residual memory.[7] There was, then, an explanation to suit whatever stance was taken on the question of the reality of ghosts.

As we shall see later in this chapter, and in others, numerous houses over the century attracted a reputation for being haunted because they were empty or derelict. In his memoir of working-class life in Salford during the early twentieth century, Robert Roberts recalled that houses rarely 'stood vacant for longer than a fortnight before ghosts got in'.[8] Some houses were, however, abandoned because they were thought to be haunted. The former situation represents a different category of internal haunted space to the latter. The haunting was not concerned with the intimacy between the dead and the bereaved or subsequent residents inside the property, it was about what abandonment of a social space meant to the community outside. If people failed to occupy a human environment then external forces would move in; perhaps a mysterious gang of criminals, but maybe also supernatural visitants such as witches, boggarts and ghosts.[9]

Sometimes houses were said to be haunted when to be more precise it was only certain spaces within them that attracted phenomena. The ghost might be limited to the room in which a person was murdered or committed suicide. The haunting could even be restricted to a single piece of furniture, as was heard during an unusual libel case tried at the Norwich Assizes in the summer of 1866. Honour Lingley and her husband, a shepherd, rented a house at Sprowston, which was commonly known in the village as the 'Haunted Cottage'. The Lingleys apparently did not know of its reputation before renting it, and it was a neighbour who informed them that a ghost haunted the closet. After hearing this, Honour 'felt timid' whenever she went near it. One day, when the Lingley's were out, two young men from Sprowston entered the premises and fired at the haunted closet and a picture hanging in one of the rooms. The police were called to investigate the break-in and the libel resulted from a letter Honour Lingley wrote to the *Norwich Argus* complaining of the constables' behaviour. She claimed in the letter that they rifled through her private belongings, mocking her and insinuating she had stolen some of her linen.[10]

The bedroom was most frequently the focus of ghostly visitations, whether they were hoaxes, hallucinations or perceived realities. As well as being where

people most often breathed their last, it was also the room where deep emotions were most frequently manifested. It was a place for dreaming, having sex, exchanging intimate confidences and expressing solitary anguish. Undressed in the darkness, this was where people felt most exposed psychologically. That said, bedroom hauntings were sometimes passive even comforting affairs, such as the sight of ghosts standing still at the foot of the bed, or the stroke of an invisible hand. But bedrooms were also the scenes of some of the most violent and frightening experiences. The astrologer and occultist John Heydon (1629–c.1670) recounted how one of his mother's maids was pulled out of her bed one night by the ghost of a lover named John Stringer, who had recently been murdered by a jealous admirer. Despite three doors leading to her bedroom being locked, the maid 'had the right side of her haire and headcloths clean shaved or cut away' by Stringer's ghost.[11] A gentlewoman friend of Richard Baxter was subjected to a violent spirit disturbing her bed: 'she had not time to dress her self, such Cries and other things almost amazing her, but she (hardly any of her Cloths on) with her two Maids, got upon their knees by the Bedside to seek the Lord'.[12] The ghostly grabbing of bedcovers was a particularly common and disturbing phenomenon. In 1899, for example, a Wiltshire folklorist was told by one man that his bedclothes were once pulled off by two ghostly maidens. 'I'll throw my shoe at 'ee', he threatened them.[13] One gets the strong impression that with some physical bedroom hauntings there is an undoubted sexual component, with the gender difference between haunter and haunted being more explicit than in manifestations occurring elsewhere.

According to numerous legends, those murdered inside houses sometimes left a permanent bloody reminder of their tragic end. The ghost was in effect a stain. In January 1789 Hannah Corbridge, of Laneshaw Bridge, Near Colne, Lancashire, had her throat cut by her lover Christopher Hartley, who was subsequently executed. He hid her body near Barnside Hall and when the Hall was pulled down some years later some of the sandstone was brought back to Laneshaw, where it was reported that Hannah's blood was seen oozing from them. Such a sensation caused crowds of people from around the area to flock to the site.[14] In the early nineteenth century a parlour flagstone at Green Top, Pudsey, was thought to be stained with the blood of a murder victim. Even when the flagstone was replaced the stain reappeared.[15] More recently, in the parish of Llanigon, near Hay, a story recorded in the 1920s told that a woman who had her throat cut dipped her hand in her blood and daubed it on the wall before dying. It remained an indelible stain and subsequent tenants had to place furniture in front to hide it. Around the same time, further north in Shropshire, there was a house near Wenlock Edge where another murdered

woman smeared her bloody hand on a window pane and even when the glass was replaced the hand print reappeared.[16]

The gaol cell was another internal living space that most people would have loathed to call home but where many died in torment and terrible circumstances. A young pickpocket told the Victorian social investigator Henry Mayew: 'the only thing that frightens me when I'm in prison is sleeping in a cell by myself … You can't imagine how one dreams when in trouble. I've often started up in a fright from a dream. I don't know what might appear. I've heard people talk about ghosts and that.' He went on to recount how, during one such stay, the noise of water dripping into a tin excited much agitation amongst the inmates: 'all in the ward were shocking frightened; and weren't we glad when we found out what it was!'[17] The boy's fears were understandable. Murderers spent their final hours in the their cells, some no doubt wracked by guilt and haunted by the ghosts of their victims. The corpses of the executed were often buried in the precincts. No wonder, then, that when the Quaker founder George Fox was flung into Launceston Castle gaol in 1656 he soon discovered that his fellow inmates believed that ghosts haunted the condemned cell.[18] The day before his execution in 1697, the highwayman John Shorter was very disturbed at seeing the ghost of a murdered prisoner named Lorimer, which appeared as he prayed in the chapel at Newgate. Shorter knew Lorimer had recently been murdered in the prison by fellow inmates but he had not reported it. It evidently played on his mind as he spent his last hours of life.[19] Cut off from the rest of society and living a twilight life in semi-darkness, the occupants of the cells existed in a state halfway between life and death,[20] which fostered a heightened spiritual awareness, as many 'last dying confessions' relate.

LANDSCAPES OF DEATH

Ghosts are rarely reported appearing in churchyards these days. Only a small minority of people still go to church regularly and therefore rarely find themselves passing through burial grounds. In modern urban society most dead are buried in large municipal cemeteries set apart from the lives of the living or are incinerated in crematoriums. This development, which has been described as a dechristianisation of burial, was a result of increasing public health concerns about the spread of disease and noxious vapours emanating from overcrowded urban churchyards.[21] While burial grounds obviously remain places of remembrance and mourning, our relationship with them has changed profoundly. As church records from the medieval and early modern periods demonstrate, churchyards were important recreational places as well

as sacred spaces, used not only for commemoration but also for playing ball games, dancing and fighting, much to the chagrin of the clergy.[22] During the day the churchyard was a space shared by the living and the dead because the latter kept their distance, but as night fell it became a liminal place as the boundary between the two worlds dissolved.

It was a common Protestant observation that in Catholic times, as the Elizabethan gentlemen Reginald Scot remarked, 'everie churchyard swarmed with soules and spirits'.[23] Yet, as Peter Marshall has recently noted, there was nothing in Catholic doctrine that required purgatorial spirits to hang around their burial place.[24] Besides, in Reformation England churchyards remained a favourite haunt for ghosts. Further explanation was required from those who dismissed them as figments of Catholic 'superstition'. One of Scot's contemporaries, the writer Thomas Nashe, who believed that ghosts were nothing more than diabolic illusions, explained that

> If any ask why he [the Devil] is more conversant and busy in churchyards and places where men are buried than in any other places, it is to make us believe that the bodies and souls of the departed rest entirely in his possession and the peculiar power of death is resigned to his disposition.[25]

Turning to popular beliefs, we saw in the previous chapter that a reason was usually found why a ghost appeared. From this perspective ghosts did not hover round graveyards just because their bodies lay there; they were on a mission or wished to express an opinion on the activities of the living. This is clear from the numerous examples of churchyard hauntings reported in the nineteenth-century press.

Ghosts were commonly thought to appear to show disapproval when their graves were somehow disturbed. In the summer of 1875, for example, Mr Penhey, the proprietor off an oil and colour shop in Kingston, Surrey, decided to extend his cellar. Unfortunately it turned out that the excavated area was formerly part of the old parish churchyard. The workmen turned up numerous skulls and bones and it was not long before strange disturbances occurred. One night, just around closing time, Mrs H.P. Turner visited Penhey's shop and while in conversation chunks of plaster began to fall from the ceiling.[26] The notion that ghosts were awoken by the disturbance of their former earthly shells is also evident in an unusual court case heard by the Lambeth Street magistrates in 1841. Around eight years before, body-snatchers had entered Slater's Chapel burial ground and stolen the corpse of the wife of a Billingsgate fishmonger named Drake. His wife had requested that a pair of black silk stockings, a lace cap and several other personal articles were placed in her coffin. The body-

snatchers had left these and so Drake, with police permission, decided to remove the coffin and its sentimental contents and rebury them in his backyard at No. 7 Gower's Walk, Whitechapel. Several years later he moved several houses down, and in 1841 he asked the current occupants, a Mr Stone and his wife, if he could dig up the coffin, saying he would like to keep his wife's belongings and make a cupboard out of the coffin boards. They consented, and Drake got to work but found the wood had rotted. Since these proceedings Mrs Stone had been in a state of terror that the ghost of the dead woman would haunt the scene. Such was her dread that each night she placed all the chairs and tables against the back door of the premises.[27]

The ghosts of suicides were unlikely to appear in churchyards, as until relatively recently they were not permitted to be buried in consecrated ground. Sometimes they were thought to haunt the spots where they killed themselves. According to a letter from Nicholas Jekyll, of Castle Hedingham, to the Essex antiquarian and minister William Holman, in the spring of 1713 much excitement was caused in the village by the apparition of a man who had recently drowned himself below Jekyll's house. It was seen haunting the place, 'acting like a fellow in deep melancholy, and at last throwing himself in to water'.[28] In the early twentieth century the rectory at Boscombe was haunted by a man who hanged himself in one of the attics. Doors opened mysteriously and people felt an invisible presence.[29]

Up until the early twentieth century the ghosts of suicides were also commonly thought to haunt crossroads due to the practice of burying their bodies in the highway and driving a stake through their chests. This profane form of burial was probably quite widespread in early modern England, though evidence is scarce as there was no requirement to record burials outside the churchyard or in unconsecrated ground. However, numerous cases were reported in eighteenth-century newspapers and periodicals, suggesting the continuation of a long-standing tradition. Consider, for instance, the corpse of the murderer and self-murderer David Stirn, which was dissected in September 1760 and then buried with a wooden stake driven through it at a crossroads near Black Mary's Hole, Clerkenwell.[30] In 1851 locals believed that an old hawthorn tree at a crossroads south of Boston, Lincolnshire, had grown from one such stake hammered into the corpse of a suicide.[31] It is no surprise that ghost legends developed round these spots. The isolation of the locations, the mental torment that led people to commit self-murder and so damn their souls, and the knowledge of how their corpses were ritually desecrated, must have easily played on the imaginations of those travelling the roads at night. In Fielding's *History of Tom Jones*, first published in 1749, there is a discussion between Sophia and her maid in which the matter is discussed. When Sophia

vows that she would rather plunge a dagger into her heart than have to marry a local squire, the maid cries:

> Dear Ma'am, consider – that to be denied Christian Burial, and to have your Corpse buried in the Highway, and a Stake drove through you, as Farmer Halfpenny was served at Ox-Cross, and, to be sure, his Ghost hath walked there ever since, for several People have seen him.[32]

By 1790 one author described the practice as 'local, not general' and an Act of Parliament finally prohibited it in 1823.[33] But several centuries of its practice left numerous legends of haunted crossroads around the country, which lingered on in local tradition into the twentieth century. There was the ghost of a 'bad man' seen on a white horse at Matscombe crossroads, near Beesands, Devon. Legend had it that a suicide was buried at a crossroads near Fair Ash, Somerset, and in the early twentieth century people still thought it was consequently haunted by 'zummat'.[34] Obviously only a tiny number of crossroads were used to bury suicides, and so many of the hauntings recorded in these locations, such as those involving phantom coaches, had no relation to actual people or historical events. The association of crossroads with death meant they became general focal points for ghost legends. But in some cases ghosts can be seen as virtual roadside memorials of real events that had long since disappeared from personal remembrance. In the early twentieth century, when the rise of the car led to a major upgrading of England's minor roads, skeletons were occasionally (and still are) dug up at crossroads which locals had long held to be haunted. Human remains were found during the widening of the haunted crossroads known as Lidgett's Gap, near Scawby, Lincolnshire. Likewise when, in 1908, a new signpost was being put at a junction on the Bridgwater to Stogursey high road, Somerset, the bones of a tall man were found six inches below the surface. In the local folklore a ghost of a tall old man dressed in a ragged uniform was said to roam the spot.[35] As these legends indicate, popular belief did not suggest that the staking would prevent the tormented souls of suicides from returning as ghosts, but that it would pin them to a specific location and so prevent them from wandering too far and disturbing local villagers. The crossroads acted as a further hobble, the four possible routes confusing the poor benighted souls.[36]

Murderers too were denied a proper Christian burial. As tormented spirits they were a potentially common source of haunting. Although their ghosts more often haunted people rather than places, they were seen in gaols, and particularly from the eighteenth century onwards, those that were gibbeted lingered at the scene of their final ghoulish ignominy. A phantom black dog

was thought to prowl the spot near Tring where Thomas Colley was hanged in chains for his role in the death of Ruth Osborne, who drowned whilst being swum as a suspected witch in 1751. Legend also had it that the ghost of a murderer who killed a man at the crossroads between Castle Cary and Wincanton in 1790, haunted the place where he was gibbeted.[37]

As these cases indicated, there would seem to be historical parameters to such hauntings. Gibbeting had been practised in the early modern period but it was by no means a common form of capital punishment.[38] It was in response to the perceived increase in murders during the mid eighteenth century that an act of 1752 formalised and institutionalised the macabre punishments of dissection and hanging in chains to provide a graphic warning to the public. The body or just the face of the criminal was covered with pitch and suspended from the gibbet, which was usually erected either where the crime had taken place or on a prominent spot nearby. The corpse would eventually be picked and pulled to pieces by scavenging birds. Some birds took to nesting in the cavities that opened up. By the nineteenth century gibbets were a significant part of the English landscape. In the 1770s nearly 100 gibbets stood on Hounslow Heath alone. Because some gibbets and their macabre fruits were left hanging for many years, they even found themselves being recorded on maps.[39] The practice was ended in 1832, but it took a couple of decades or so for the gibbets with their rattling cages and chains to be finally removed from public display. Workmen at Jarrow probably demolished the last one in 1856.[40]

It is hardly surprising, then, that gibbet sites attracted reputations for being haunted. The corpses of the criminals, denied a Christian burial, made them prime candidates for ghosthood. This is why gibbets were often sited on parish boundaries that traversed common land in order to prevent such troubled spirits from wandering far. In *Great Expectations* Charles Dickens evoked well the sense of the supernatural that accrued such spots. When the young Pip sees Magwitch picking his way through the marshes after their first encounter, the latter is limping towards an old gibbet, its chains, which once held the body of a pirate, clanking in the wind. It was 'as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again. It gave me a terrible turn when I thought so; and as I saw the cattle lifting their heads to gaze after him, I wondered whether they thought so too.'[41] The Cumbrian antiquarian Henry Swainson Cowper remarked that a former gibbet spot near Hawkshead, was dreaded even during daylight. Writing in 1899 he noted that 'probably there are now many people who are unaware that a gibbet ever stood here', but the haunting evidently remained as a memorial.[42]

The spirits of the murdered appeared more frequently than their killers. In unsolved cases, this was a matter of identifying the murderer and ensuring

justice was done. Sometimes, though, the bodies of victims were not found and so did not receive a Christian burial. Rather like purgatorial delay, it was up to the ghosts of those so grievously sinned against to return and ensure that justice was done before they could rest peacefully until the Day of Judgement. It was commonly thought therefore, that ghosts hovered over the hidden bodies. Francis Grose wondered why the ghosts of those murdered did not go straight to the nearest justice of the peace, rather than hang about their burial place frightening passers-by. 'Ghosts have undoubtedly forms and customs peculiar to themselves', he concluded.[43] To give just one amongst numerous examples of this tradition, in the spring of 1806 a butcher of Stretford, near Manchester, disappeared after some bad flooding in the town. A rumour soon spread that he had been murdered, and it was reported that numerous people had seen his ghost at midnight wandering near a deep pool of water. A town meeting was convened and it was agreed that the pool be pumped dry in search of the butcher's body. It was duly discovered, although the fact that money and valuables were found on the corpse suggested his death was accidental.[44]

Battlefields were another location in the landscape where the dead lay without a proper Christian burial. Somewhat surprisingly, though, prior to the twentieth century there is not a great deal of evidence regarding the presence of ghosts at such sites. The popular literature of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries certainly contained frequent reports of apparitions of armies fighting in the sky both in England and abroad. However, these were usually prophetic visions disseminated for political propaganda purposes rather than representations of the apparitions of the dead involved in recent battles.[45] One of the few reported instances of ghosts haunting a battlefield occurred a month or so after the battle of Edgehill, Warwickshire, in October 1642. The villagers of nearby Kineton heard the sound of drums, trumpets, and the noise of battle. The earth groaned with 'the weight of lives whose last beds there were made to sleepe upon'. An apparition of the fighting was seen in the night sky, while on the ground three locals saw a long way in front of them on the road 'the likeness of a Troope of horses posting up to them with full speede, which caus'd the Countrymen to make a stop as fearfull of their events. But coming neer unto them they of a sudaine sunke into the earth'. So fearful were the people of Kineton that women were reported to have had miscarriages.[46] While the Monmouth rebellion raised its fair share of enduring ghost stories in the West Country, the Civil War remains the main source of first-hand, twentieth-century battlefield ghost sightings. In 1932, for instance, a commercial traveller driving across Marston Moor saw three men dressed rather like Royalist soldiers walking along the road before vanishing.[47] Away from English soil, during World War I some British soldiers reported seeing

the ghosts of their dead comrades, such as the various sightings of some stretcher-bearers blown up by a shell during the battle of the Somme. One soldier swore they had carried him to safety.[48]

TREASURE SITES

Ghosts not only hovered over the burial places of the dead, they also liked to linger where valuable goods lay buried. Daniel Defoe considered this one of the most absurd but widespread popular beliefs regarding ghosts. It was 'impossible to beat it out of their Heads', he moaned, 'and if they should see any thing which they call an Apparition, they would to this Day follow it, in hope to hear it give a Stamp on the Ground, as with its Foot, and then vanish'. They would dig in the 'hopes of finding a Pot of Money hid there, or some old Urn with Ashes and Roman Medals'. If you tried to reason with them and say there was no basis for their confidence, 'they would laugh at it as the greatest Jest imaginable, and tell you there were five hundred Examples to the contrary'.[49] The tradition was still going strong nearly two centuries later, according to the Herefordshire folklorist Ella Leather. She remarked that it was a general belief that if someone hid or buried money or valuable possessions their spirit would have to haunt the spot until someone had the courage to say to it, 'In the name of God, who art thou?' She remembered hearing the wife of an old workman, who lay ill in bed, say that she had to go and search for his tools, which he had left under an archway, otherwise 'he might have to haunt the place after death'.[50]

As this story suggests, some treasures were of recent deposition, and often based around a local miser who secreted his savings somewhere in his property. In December 1867 considerable excitement was caused in the village of Hawkchurch, Somerset, by the ghostly flitting of a candle behind the windows of an abandoned cottage. An elderly pauper had owned it, and it was rumoured that he had hidden a large sum of money in the walls. After his death the cottage was searched but no treasure was found.[51] Otherwise treasures were located outdoors and usually in association with prehistoric earthworks, particularly Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows which were often thought to be gateways to the world of the fairies and their wealth. In the early twentieth century a ghost guarded gold treasure buried in a tumulus near Minchinhampton.[52] Half a century earlier, people in the area of Chanctonbury Ring, a small Iron Age hill fort in Sussex, believed that the ghost of an old man with a long white beard haunted a spot at the bottom of the hill. Legend had it that he had been seen at dusk combing the ground 'as if in search of treasure'.

This haunting was recounted in a report on the finding of an Anglo-Saxon coin hoard near the spot in 1866.[53]

Hidden treasures were as much a part of urban as of rural tradition. As we shall see in the next chapter, the seventeenth-century eccentric politician Goodwin Wharton went on numerous treasure hunts in and around the capital. The belief was encouraged by popular literature. In 1705 a pamphlet recorded the amazing discovery of a chest full of money in an old building in Rosemary Lane, London, thanks to the directions provided by a female ghost.[54] A curious pamphlet describing another treasure-seeking escapade in London was published in the early 1820s. It was purportedly written by one Patrick Reardon, a former sailor who made a small living selling coffee to labourers at the West India Docks in London. On 22 July 1820, an apparition of a woman appeared to him around midnight and told him to dig under his house. She appeared again with the same message three days later. The following day the apparition expressed its impatience, saying, with ghosts' usual fondness for triplication, 'If you do not act agreeable to my directions you WILL RUE IT! YOU WILL RUE IT! YOU WILL RUE IT all the days of your life.'[55] He experienced no further visitations from her until 20 January 1821. Reardon finally decided to act, and with the help of an acquaintance began to dig at a spot pointed out by the apparition. Their work was interrupted by the appearance of a black serpent. Despite overcoming this obstacle all they found was a pair of shoes and an old key. Further excavations were halted by the landlord of the property where they were digging, and they were arrested and incarcerated at Shadwell police station for 24 hours. Reardon's account could be dismissed as journalistic invention, exploiting the well-worn theme of 'Authentic Narratives' common in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but it does have the ring of truth about it, and a similar scenario was played out for real 50 years later. In April 1871 two young men named Richard Ball and Samuel Savage, of Globe Lane, Woolwich, were charged with illegal entry before the Greenwich magistrates. Ball and Savage were caught entering a vacant property next to the Crown and Sceptre Tavern in Greenwich. It transpired in court that Ball's father and grandfather had once occupied the house, and on his deathbed his father had told him, 'Look under the stairs, where you will find a lot of money.' In early April, Ball dreamed over several nights that an apparition appeared to him, which pointed and said three times, 'Under the stairs.' It was with the intention of following the instructions of this extraordinary messenger that he and his friend entered the vacant property. Much to his consternation the stairs had evidently been removed, and to complete a disastrous night they were arrested. On hearing this account, and proof having been supplied that Ball's family had indeed owned the property, the presiding magistrate decided

to let off the two men.[56] The historical record would seem to bear out Daniel Defoe's conclusion that 'in all my Search after those things, and after evidence of Fact, I cannot arrive to one Example, where ever an Apparition directed to the finding Money hid in the Ground or Earth, or any other place'.[57]

WATER

A significant minority of ghosts were seen frequenting lakes, pools and rivers. In boggy or marshy places these were sometimes will-o'-the-wisps, around which legends accrued. Other sightings were interpreted as the spirits of those who had drowned themselves. In the 1920s a Suffolk folklorist reported that for generations it was thought that an old woman named Mother Wakely drowned herself in a local pond, and that her spirit sometimes appeared to those who passed by the spot and tried to drag them in.[58] A few cases, such as the ghost of a man fishing, could have been generated by a repetitive action associated with a known individual.[59] Another explanation for some haunted pools and lakes in out of the way places was that clergymen had laid troublesome ghosts there to prevent them from disturbing communities. With the tradition of White Ladies and their liking for pools, particularly ones described as deep, we move to an interpretation of water sources as liminal places, portals between the worlds of the living and the spirits. A similar symbolic meaning could help explain why ghosts were also sometimes found on or under bridges.

In 1668 a tailor named John Bowman, of Greenhill, deposed to a magistrate that on returning home from Sheffield market shortly before Ascension Day:

> One John Brumhead overtooke him, and they past along until they came against the cutlers bridge. And when they came at the said bridge they had some discourse concerneing an apparition that had beene seene there, as it was reported, in the shape and corporall forme of a man that they called Earle George. And as they were speakeinge of itt, of a sudden there visibly appeared unto them a man lyke unto a prince, with a greene doublet and ruff … whereupon this examinate was sorelye affrighted and fell into a swound or trannce.[60]

Samuel Bamford recalled how in his childhood in Middleton Lancashire, the locals much feared Owler Bridge and the field that led up to it, in which it was believed a murder had once been committed. It was 'thronged by spirits, whilst "fairees" were frequently seen dancing and gambolling on the bridge, and the bank of the stream on either side'. When his father, a Nonconformist

weaver, had to pass over the bridge at night, he 'seldom forgot to hum a psalm or hymn tune, whilst on his way'.[61] Scholar's Bridge, between Sapcote and Stoney Stanton, Leicestershire, was likewise a focus for ghosts and strange appearances, as were two bridges near Normanby, Lincolnshire. Horses had a tell-tale objection to passing over one of them.[62]

There was a tradition that clergymen also laid ghosts under bridges. A legend from Bagbury, Shropshire, told of how the ghost of an unpleasant old man, which tormented the village in the guise of a bull, asked a parson to lay him under Bagbury Bridge, but he was cast into the Red Sea instead.[63] In such instances, and with examples such as Owler Bridge, the hauntings have a historical, albeit legendary explanation. Other bridge hauntings did not, however, and this observation, as with White Lady traditions, seems to be significant. It is possible, of course, that by the time some legends were recorded, historical explanations may have been lost from the communal memory. But as the example of Owler Bridge indicates, the bridge acted not only as a practical, physical crossing point but also as a spirit access point. Casting a ghost under a bridge either banished it to the spirit realm or trapped it between the two worlds. Regarding those ghosts with no personal history, then perhaps, as with the White Lady tradition, they have their origins in fairy hauntings rather than human events.

Occasionally ghosts travelled beyond land to haunt sailors at sea. In February 1843 word spread through Sunderland that a mariner on board the Myrtle had been visited by the ghost of his sister while out at sea. Her body lay in a Sunderland churchyard and it was reported that her ghost would visit her brother again in port at midnight a few days later. Apparently a crowd of more than 1,000 people gathered around the church in expectation of seeing the woman's spirit make its way to her brother's ship.[64] In such an enclosed, intense and dangerous physical and social environment the sighting of a ghost, and the excitement and fear it generated, could lead to tragedy. A murder on board the British vessel the *Pontiac*, which was taking a cargo of Guano from the port of Callao, on the 13 October 1863, was linked to the sighting of a ghost on board. A Greek sailor named Moyatos stabbed to death a fellow seaman, Robert Campbell, and gravely injured another named George Williams. Moyatos claimed that God had revealed to him that the two men had been bribed by the captain of another ship to throw him overboard. Moyatos's paranoid suspicions were confirmed in his mind by overhearing Campbell and Williams talking of stabbing and chucking someone overboard. The conversation was actually a joke between the two men about what they would do to a ghost that the steersman and a cabin boy had said they had seen two nights before. A good number of the seamen feared that the apparition

had appeared as a forewarning of a disaster that would befall the ship, though others like Campbell and Williams mocked the idea. Neither had any idea, of course, that the disaster was to befall them. No doubt for some on board the murder was confirmation of the ghost's prophetic appearance. Moyatos was brought to trial in Scotland and declared insane.[65]

MINES

The intense and dangerous nature of work in the mines was rather similar to those on board ships, but as subterranean places these were also liminal spaces where fairies and spirits were frequently encountered. Referring to fairy beings known as 'knockers', a book on 'Signals from the World of Spirits', published in 1800, remarked that 'the history of mine-working is inseparable from the observation of the existence of these visible, though untangible beings'.[66] A century earlier, the Cornishman Thomas Tonkin wrote of the 'Many strange stories we have, more especially among the miners, of fairies or, as they call them, piskeys, small people, etc.; of their discovering mines to them.'[67] These 'knackers', 'nuggies' or 'knockers' were once described as small, wizened creatures, or little old men, who some thought were the spirits of the Jews who crucified Jesus.[68] Following on from the discussions on pools and bridges, it is now understandable why ghosts would be found in such subterranean company, and, the terrible loss of life in mining accidents provided plenty of material for legend formation and first-hand experiences of ghosts. But while knockers usually kept themselves to themselves as long as humans respected their presence, ghosts served to help their mining colleagues.

During the early twentieth century some Durham miners continued to believe strongly that the spirits of those killed in the mines, and also the ghosts of children, appeared to forewarn miners of an imminent collapse. The ghosts of those killed in such accidents were also thought to linger on the spot as a reminder of their fate.[69] On a personal level a man known to the Victorian Cornish antiquarian, Joseph Hammond, was warned of an imminent mine collapse by the appearance of the ghost of another miner, who had died several weeks before at the treacherous mine end being investigated by Hammond's informant. The seriousness with which mining communities interpreted such apparitions is evident from an incident at Shirland Colliery, near Alfreton, Derbyshire in October 1867. A few days after a miner was accidentally killed down the mine, a colleague working down the pit claimed he saw the ghost of the man. The news spread quickly among his fellow workers who downed tools and demanded to be taken up, evidently fearing a collapse. When they

emerged at the surface they informed the next shift of the apparition, and they refused to go down. In all, 200 men and boys refused to work until the mine was considered safe.[70]

URBAN GHOSTS

In his account of the 'present state' of England, written in 1732, the historian Thomas Salmon, with typical Enlightenment ignorance, stated that 'the People of London are not so superstitious as those in the Country; we seldom hear of Apparitions, Witches, or Haunted Houses about Town'. He concluded that those Londoners who believed in such things must have 'lately come out of the Country, and have not yet overcome the Prejudices of their Education'.[71] The paucity of urban ghosts in the folklore archives of the nineteenth century would seem to support such a view. But folklorists rarely ventured into the massively expanding urban areas of industrial England, and the countryside was assumed to be the natural home for spirits. So, did ghosts wander the backstreets of slums and the dark corners of the rookeries just as they paced the isolated byways, bridges and pools of the countryside? Not quite, but nineteenth-century urban England still teemed with ghosts and turning to other sources reveals a vibrant belief in haunted houses and churchyards.

In the 1840s the perceptive critic of human credulity Charles Mackay complained that there were many houses in London blighted by a ghostly reputation. One thinks of Thomas Salmon when Mackay wrote, 'If any vain boaster of the march of intellect would but take the trouble to find them out and count them, he would be convinced that intellect must yet make some enormous strides.'[72] In 1863 the *Court Journal*, a London paper dedicated to literature, science and art, bemoaned the fact that 'the number of so-called haunted houses that are closed and have gone to decay in and about town, under this mouldering and blighting reputation is ridiculously large. We know of half a dozen such.'[73] The reader will find numerous cases to support these views throughout this book.

While haunted houses were as common in town and country, it would appear that in the nineteenth-century urban landscape, churchyards became a more frequent focus for hauntings than they were in rural areas. This is understandable considering that there were fewer liminal features in the urban environment to attract legends. Another reason was the fear raised by body-snatchers or Resurrectionists, which was at its peak in the 1830s. This created a general concern and interest in nocturnal churchyard activity and consequently a heightened awareness of potential ghosts. Grieving mothers

mounted night-time vigils over their deceased children, for example, and this led to the occasional haunting scare, such as at St Giles's Church, London, in August 1834. One night, around eleven o'clock, large crowds gathered there as rumours spread of a ghost sighting. Several intrepid men climbed the railings to investigate the shadowy figure seen moving among the gravestones. Instead of a spirit they found a poor Irishwoman, named Anne Macarthy, of Buckeridge Street. Her son had been recently buried there, and having heard that 'resurrection-men' were about, decided to set guard by his grave.[74] The concern regarding body-snatchers and ghost sightings led to a rather farcical prosecution in 1851. In August rumours circulated in the vicinity of Shadwell Church, London, that a ghost was haunting the cemetery. As usual, crowds soon gathered nightly in the hope of seeing it. As Peter Mellish, the vestry clerk of the church, later explained in court, the rumours began when a poor old woman, who lived in one of the almshouses near the church, was seen passing through the churchyard late one night with a pint of beer, choosing this route to avoid going up the steep slope of Foxe's Lane to the east of the church. One man who was unaware of this, but who did not believe there was a ghost, was a local drover named Henry Loomer. His father was buried in the churchyard and, fearing that body-snatchers were about, Loomer and a fellow drover named Garret Berry climbed over the churchyard railings, the gate being locked to prevent ghost hunters, and searched around the tombs. They found two young men in hiding and a punch-up ensued until the police arrested them. The two men, John Beasley and Henry Ridley, who turned out to be tea-urn makers from St Lukes and Hoxton, were subsequently tried for being in the churchyard for an unlawful purpose. They claimed they were only there looking for the ghost and were discharged.[75]

The need in populous urban areas for dead-houses, where bodies lay before inquests, provided another source of ghosts, who were troubled by the delay in receiving a proper burial. In the late eighteenth century James Lackington reported the haunting of a London hospital. The ghost was confined to the lower part of the building where a continual tapping on the windows was heard. The nurses concluded that it was the work of the spirit of one of the dead bodies kept close by in the dead-house. So fearful were the nurses that they refused to go from ward to ward if it required entering the haunted part of the building.[76] In July 1868 an estimated 2,000 people congregated nightly around Bermondsey Church. The vicar and parish officials tried to get the crowds to disperse but were ignored. As the police arrived, James Jones, aged 19, climbed up on to the railings and shouted to the mob, 'Don't go; there it is again; there's the ghost!', leading to scuffles with the police. It later transpired in court that, a few days before, a dead body had been pulled out of the river

and taken to the dead-house adjoining the church until an inquest could be arranged. Hearing of this, some boys in the neighbourhood began to spread the rumour that a ghost was haunting the churchyard, causing large numbers of people in the district to flock to the church after work in expectations of seeing it.[77] For several decades the memory of the haunting lived on in the lore of the local community, and up until 1895 it was included in the calendar of notable events published in the *Southwark Annual*.[78]

COMMERCE AND TOURIST SPOTS

To a significant extent tourism now defines where ghosts are seen. The phrase 'most haunted' has become part of the English tourist experience, with numerous pubs, villages and towns laying claim to the title. Ghost tours and walks have recently become a popular leisure activity. Visitors to Epworth, for instance, can take advantage of a ghost trek inspired by the Wesleys' experience.[79] These tours have proved particularly successful by placing heritage ghosts in a firmly urban setting, broadening tourism's more traditional association of ghosts with castles and stately homes.[80] Haunted locations were advertised as tourist attractions in Victorian travel guides, such as Harriet Martineau's *Guide to the Lake District* (1858), and in attempts to attract English middle-class visitors to Scotland by advertising places mentioned in the hugely popular Scottish novels of Walter Scott.[81] But the tourist ghost is a largely twentieth-century phenomenon. We can see an early sign of things to come from the following advertisement placed in *The Times* in September 1936:

> HAUNTED HOUSE for SALE: XVIth-century house in quiet Sussex village: ideal for GUEST HOUSE. Freehold £5,000 or offer.

A few days later, an editorial in the newspaper pondering the continued appeal of ghosts observed: 'Ghosts may come and ghosts may go; ghosts may emigrate or be let with bedrooms to tourists.'[82] A comment by the psychical investigator William Salter, writing in 1961, indicates how overseas tourism was by then already influencing the marketing of hauntings. 'I have been told', he said, ' that enterprising travel agencies in America hold out as one of the principal attractions of a visit to the United Kingdom the prospect of seeing our historic ghosts.'[83]

The history of the haunted pub provides us with both a good example of the impact of modern tourism and also the longer tradition of the commercial exploitation of ghosts. Today there is a cottage industry of publications and

websites regarding haunted pubs and inns.[84] In contrast, there are relatively few instances prior to the twentieth century. Thomas Burke's classic cultural and historical survey, *The English Inn*, first published in 1930, contains numerous tales and legends of visiting monarchs, murders and highwaymen, but little about ghosts.[85]

While neither obvious liminal spaces nor desolate places, there are reasons why pubs and inns might have attracted a reputation for haunting. Although they were convivial and social institutions, in the early modern period and the eighteenth century they often had reputations for being hubs of criminal activity. Drink and violence led to murders, and then as now, people sometimes chose such a public place to commit suicide. The seventeenth-century astrologer William Lilly recalled in his autobiography how when in service, before he became an astrologer, he found on the body of his dead mistress a small scarlet bag containing several protective magical sigils. One of them had belonged to her former husband. He had once lodged at a Sussex inn, and spent the night in a chamber where only a few months before a grazier had cut his throat. For many years following this unsettling stay her husband believed he was plagued by the suicide's spirit, which continually urged him to slit his own throat. Her husband would often shout out 'I defy thee, I defy thee' and spit at the ghost. He sank into depression and evident mental illness, so to try and put an end his torment his wife went to consult Dr Simon Forman, a famed astrologer-physician of Lambeth. He provided her husband with a charm that apparently relieved him of his haunting as long as he wore it, which he did until his death.[86]

Even back in the seventeenth century, though, we find signs of how pubs and inns could exploit hauntings. The pamphlet published in 1679 recording the appearance of a ghost in Holborn that revealed where the bodies of two children lay buried, advertised that those not convinced by the account could see the children's bones on display at the local Cheshire Cheese Inn.[87] Although the famous Cock Lane ghost of 1762 did not appear in a hostelry, the writer Horace Walpole, who visited the haunted house, remarked cynically in a letter that 'provisions are sent in like forage, and all the taverns and alehouses in the neighbourhood make fortunes'.[88] A handful of haunted pubs were reported in the mid-nineteenth century and the newspapers implied that a commercial explanation lay behind the ghost sightings. Consider, for example, the haunting of the Tiger public house, Wirksworth, Derbyshire, in June 1834. One of the guest rooms at the pub run by William Lowe was disturbed by the regular violent shutting of a box and the flapping of a table-leaf between ten and eleven o'clock at night, annoying both Lowe's family and the neighbours. As the news spread, large crowds gathered, beyond the usual drinking hours, both inside

and outside, to hear the haunting. As a newspaper commented, it had caused a deal 'of money to be spent, and been the means of filling Boniface's pockets, and emptying his cellar.'[89] Boniface, it should be noted, was a literary name for the jovial landlord of a country tavern.[90] A similar lucrative outcome resulted from the haunting of the Feathers Hotel, Manchester, in May and June 1869. Staff and guests were disturbed nightly by strange noises and the periodic ringing of all the bells at once. The wiring was rearranged and muffles put on the bells to try and stop the noise. This proved successful for nearly a week until they began to ring again more violently. The rumour spread around the district that a policeman and a couple of boys had seen a ghostly figure in black, and consequently hundreds gathered nightly in expectation of catching a glimpse. As the *Manchester Examiner* punned, the crowds' 'thirst of knowledge, or other desire, have been exorbitant in their demands for spirits, to the no small profit of the landlord'.[91] However, all these cases were not really about tourism – in other words, providing entertainment for holidaymakers. These hauntings were a strategy for pulling in more local punters. It was in the twentieth-century that the marketing men and women began to see the tourist potential of sleeping, eating and drinking with ghosts.

The idea of whole communities being ghost-infested is an obvious product of modern tourism. It is a reversal of the historic position where communities desired to be rid of their spirits. Villages, towns and cities now boast of the number of ghosts they have. Prestbury has been suggested as a contender for the most haunted village in the Cotswolds, if not England. Warrington has been described as 'England's Most Ghost-infested Town', and Barnet as the most haunted borough. In 2002 York was 'officially' given the title of most haunted city in Europe by the President of the Ghost Research Foundation International.[92] The most successful winner (though some locals might say loser) in this tourist competition is Pluckley in Kent. A gazetteer of ghosts, written in 1971 described it as the most haunted village in the county, but it shot to national and even international prominence when the 1998 edition of the *Guinness Book of Records* awarded it the title of most haunted village in the country.[93] It has now become a must-visit place for those fascinated by ghosts.

Ghost hunting as a collective recreational activity is nothing new. Haunted houses and churchyards attracted large crowds in the past. What the tourist industry has done is to reformulate and package the experience by creating a synergy between visitor, place and ghost. The visitor is now a customer, the place has a brand identity, and the ghost is a desirable lodger rather than an unwelcome guest. The landscape is still full of ghosts but you are better off looking for them on the tourist trail than on a trek through the countryside.

Three

Seeking Ghosts

Nearly all the ghost sightings discussed so far were unexpected and unwanted. Graveyards and haunted spots in the countryside were to be avoided. Encounters were startling at best and fatal at worse. It can be safely said that most people had no desire to ever find themselves in the presence of a ghost. To prevent such a meeting it fell to certain members of the community to step forward and confront the spirits of the dead in order to banish them from the world of the living. Yet it is human nature to be fascinated with the macabre, the ghoulish and the supernatural – as long as the experience is vicarious and on our own terms, and so people gained a voyeuristic thrill in glimpsing or hearing the haunting of others. Some had a more positive and earnest perception of ghosts, however, and saw them as a means of accessing the secrets of nature, providing a glimpse of divine wisdom. Due to their celestial position ghosts had knowledge of the past, present and future. Their existence was defined by the past, their presence was witnessed by the living, and most wondrous of all, their experience of the afterlife gave them intimations of the future of life. No wonder, then, that there has always been a minority who have sought their company.

NECROMANCY

Ancient Greek and Roman tragedies, plays and poems furnished early modern demonologists with numerous examples of magicians and witches raising ghosts to seek their aid and to foretell the future – necromancy, in other words.[1] In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus, under the instructions of the sorceress Circe, calls up the spirits of the dead with prayers and blood sacrifice. Horace gave us the brutal necromantic witches Canidia and Sagana. Several Greek papyri discovered in more recent times demonstrate that there were specific rituals for calling up the dead, yet it is noteworthy that there is little historical evidence of necromancy actually being practised in the classical period.[2] More significantly,

the Bible also held out the possibility of necromancy. The account of how the woman of Endor supposedly raised the spirit of the prophet Samuel, as told in I Samuel 28, was enigmatic enough in its description to provoke endless debate – it was still the cause of tetchy argument in the mid nineteenth century, as evident from an exchange of letters in *The Times*.[3] What was so controversial about Samuel 28? To set the scene, the Philistines had gathered for war against Israel and at the sight of their vast army Saul feared the outcome of battle. He hoped that God or his prophets would send him a message, but as no such communications were forthcoming he decided to turn to the diviners he had recently banished from the land. It is worth noting that in the first complete English Bible, printed in 1535, such people were described as 'soythsayers', 'expounders of tokens' and 'witches', while in the King James Bible, first published in 1611, they are 'wizards' and possessors of 'familiar spirits'. Here is what follows when Saul consulted the woman of Endor, as recounted in the King James version:

> Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.
>
> And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.
>
> And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.
>
> And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?

For some theologians, from the beginning of the Christian Church through to the modern era, this passage was the ultimate proof that through divine intervention the spirits of the dead could return to communicate with the living. Yet even in the early years of the church there was no consensus about the reality of Samuel's ghost.[4] There was certainly general agreement that the woman of Endor, or 'Witch' as she commonly came to be known, did not have the power to summon the dead, but some argued that God had, for his own reasons, commanded Samuel's spirit to arise in conjunction with the woman of Endor's pretence. Others were less willing to interpret I Samuel 28 quite so literally, suggesting that either God had allowed a demon in the shape of Samuel to appear, or that a demon had deceived Saul into thinking he had received the prophecy from Samuel. As early as the mid third century

AD such scepticism was quite widespread in theological circles. We know as much from an attack on critics by one of the most influential early church fathers, Origen of Alexandria (185–254).[5] The interpretive problems caused by the passage are also evident in St Augustine's (354–430) shifting opinions on the matter.

To counter those who held literally to the wording of the passage, those who denied that Saul had been raised from the dead had to deconstruct the language of the Bible's authors. They argued that, following their usual condensed writing style, the Bible scribes felt it was unnecessary to express explicitly that 'a demon appeared in Samuel's shape' or that the woman of Endor 'saw a vision of Samuel'. They took it for granted, asserted the sceptics, that readers would know that she was a fraud. Another argument that was repeated for centuries concerned the fact that Saul heard but did no see Samuel, and therefore the woman of Endor's use of ventriloquism could easily have deceived him. By the fourteenth century the demonic impersonation of Samuel had become the orthodox theological interpretation. The preoccupation was consequently less with the figures of Saul and Samuel and increasingly with the woman of Endor as heretical necromancer, while in the iconography of the event the Devil entered the picture for the first time.[6]

During the era of the witch trials in the early modern period, those who questioned the reality of witchcraft adopted the argument that the raising of Samuel was nothing more than human deception. The Elizabethan sceptic Reginald Scot observed: 'He that weigheth well that place, and looketh into it advisedly, shall see that Samuel was not raised from the dead; but that it was an illusion or cozenage practised by the witch.'[7] The seventeenth-century physician Thomas Ady echoed Scot in dismissing the possibility of a diabolic miracle. 'That the Devil can assume and raise a dead Body, it is most absurd and blasphemous,' he asserted, 'for it was by the divine miraculous power of Christ upon the Cross, that the bodies of the dead were raised for a time, and appeared unto many.'[8] This did not, of course, preclude the possibility that the Devil deluded Saul through illusion. The more contentious issue was whether the woman of Endor was also duped or was working *with* the Devil. The latter interpretation was adopted by the Puritan clergy and used as a key defence for the existence of diabolic witches. The clergyman Thomas Cooper (c. 1569–1626), for instance, denounced those 'patrones of Witch-craft' who argued that Satan deceived the woman of Endor. For Cooper, 'the witch, by vertue of the covenant with Satan, raised him up; He by his power and skill counterfeited Samuel'.[9] In Puritan England, then, the definition of 'necromancer' became, as the Calvinist clergyman John Edwards (1637–1716) described, one 'who

by Magick Inchantment raised the Souls of the Dead, or the Devil rather to represent Souls, and then consulted with him'.[10]

In 1604 a new Act of Parliament was passed that reflected the deep concerns of King James regarding the necromantic activities of witches and magicians. It expanded upon the Elizabethan Act against witchcraft and conjuration, including the prosecution of all those who

> consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any intent or pupose; or take any dead man woman or child out of his her or theire grave or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone or any other parte of any dead person, to be imployed or used in any manner of Witchecrafte, Sorcerie, Charme or Inchantment.

One of the main influences fuelling James's concern over necromancy was the dissemination of the *Fourth Book of Cornelius Agrippa*, which he recommended to the readers of his *Dæmonologie* as a principal source on the 'rites, & curiosities of these black arts'.[11] By the early seventeenth century the *Fourth Book* had, indeed, become an influential and widely used manual of spirit conjuration across Europe, but Agrippa certainly did not write it. Agrippa's fame and the success of his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* made his name an attractive marketing tool. The *Fourth Book* first appeared in the mid sixteenth century, years after Agrippa's death, and although an English edition only appeared in 1655, manuscript versions and continental editions were circulating in England long before then. The *Fourth Book* was primarily concerned with the conjuration of good and evil angels, but at the end it devoted a few pages to the souls of the dead. It advised that they were 'not easily raised up, except it be the souls of them whom we know to be evil, or to have perished by a violent death, and whose bodies do want a rite and due burial'. For this reason it was usually not safe to conduct necromantic rites where the bodies of such troubled souls lay, and instead the *Fourth Book* advised the reader to take 'some principal part of the body that is relict, and therewith to make perfume in due manner, and to perform other competent rites'.[12]

Most of the discussion on the souls of the dead in the *Fourth Book*, though not the practical advice above, referred back to Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. This was not a manual of practical magic but a learned disquisition on the science and religion of Neoplatonic thought. In his chapter on 'What wayes the Magicians and Necromancers do think they can call forth the souls of the dead', Agrippa started from the premise that 'souls after death do as yet love their body which they have left' and so 'yet wander about their carcasses

in a troubled and moist spirit'. Citing the writings of the ancients, such as Homer and Lucan, he posited that it was possible for necromancers to attract these souls back to their host bodies by enhancing the spiritual harmony that existed between body and soul. This could be done through the utterance of sacred invocations and the creation of alluring 'vapours, liquors and savours, certain artificiall lights being also used, songs, sounds and such like'.[13] The only limitation was that the spirit raising needed to take place where corpses lay, such as burial grounds, places of execution and battlefields, for that was where pining souls hovered. Agrippa distinguished between two types of necromancy. There was necyomancy, which concerned the raising of the bodies of the dead, and required sacrificial blood; and sciomancy, in which the operator desired to call and communicate only with the spirits of the dead. He warned that diabolic spirits were equally at home amongst the dead and were liable to appear at the necromancer's summoning. Unlike the author of the *Fourth Book*, Agrippa reinforced the point that man alone could not raise the dead through magic, as it 'requireth all these things which belong not to men but to God only'. However, he also posited a scientific as well as a religious rationale for raising the dead. Sometimes, he said, the soul continued to reside in a retracted state in the body even though the body may seem dead. Thus the 'body can be wakened again and live; and thus many miracles appear in these; and of this kind many have been seen amongst the Gentiles and Jewes in former ages'.[14]

By the early modern period necromancy was often used in a more general way to describe the conjuration of any type of spirit, as well as the use of corpses in magic rituals and charms.[15] This makes it difficult to gauge the extent to which necromancy in the sense of raising the spirits of the dead was actually practised in early modern England. Those conjurers tried under the 1604 Act for entertaining spirits usually swore they were communicating only with benign spirits, fairies or angels. During her prosecution for witchcraft and spirit conjuring in 1653, the cunning-woman Anne Bodenham asseverated that 'these Spirits, such as she had, were good Spirits, and would do a Man all good Offices, all the Days of his Life'.[16] Rarely were the spirits of the dead mentioned in such trials, and we need to look elsewhere for necromancers in the sense that Agrippa used the term.

One of the few possibly authentic cases was that of the notorious Edward Kelley, the assistant to the famous Elizabethan occult philosopher and scientist John Dee (1527–1609). Dee was troubled by accusations of being a conjurer and magician in his own lifetime and accrued the reputation of a necromancer in subsequent centuries. But Dee's occult activities were not concerned with talking to ghosts. He sought communications only with the angels, hoping that they would reveal the 'true wisdome' of the natural world, while Kelley

acted as his scryer or medium, through whom the angels communicated via a crystal ball.[17] Just over 30 years after Kelley's death, the poet and antiquary John Weever related an account of how Kelley and an accomplice named Paul Waring had one night engaged in infernal ceremonies in Walton-le-Dale Park, Lancashire, to ascertain the manner and time of death of a certain young gentleman. They asked one of the young gentleman's servants which was the most recent corpse buried in the local graveyard. This turned out to be a poor man interred that same day. With the help of the servant, Kelley and Waring dug up the man's corpse and 'by their incantations, they made him (or rather some evill spirit through his Organs) to speake, who delivered strange predictions concerning the said Gentleman'.[18] Weever heard an account of the events from both the gentleman, shortly before his death, and his servant who participated in the necromancy.

The politician Goodwin Wharton (1653–1704) was another larger than life necromancer, who recorded his communications in his autobiography. To be more precise, it was his partner, a cunning-woman named Mary Parish, who acted as the medium between himself and several spirits of the dead, the most helpful of which was that of George Whitmore. Mary told Wharton that she had read in her book of magic that to conjure ghosts and keep them as spirit guides it was necessary to seek the agreement of someone before they died. She sought out Whitmore, a gentleman highway robber, who obligingly agreed to the compact and his ghost duly appeared to her shortly after his execution. He helped Parish and Wharton locate hidden treasures in such diverse places in and around the capital as Highgate Woods, Stoke Newington and Tyburn Road, though they never actually managed to find them. When Wharton asked Mary if he could meet with George's ghost face-to-face, George apparently objected strongly to the idea of also being under his command. He complained that because Wharton was only around 30 years of age – much younger than Parish who was in her early fifties – he would have to hang around on earthly business for perhaps another half a century. He was not inclined to spend such a time in the world of the living, but did agree to listen to Wharton's request in person. He refused to appear before him, however, and since only Mary could actually see Wharton's ghost this led to a rather comical scene. For being assured by Mary that George was present, Wharton set forth his arguments to the empty air. He then had to leave the room while George gave his reply to Mary. Wharton was satisfied with the results. A compromise was reached, with George's ghost agreeing to submit to Wharton during Mary's lifetime.[19]

During their various quests for treasure Mary claimed to have also called up the ghost of a man named Nicholson who agreed to show them where he had hidden some money and goods on his premises. There was also Mr Abab,

a great French chemist who had lived in Montpelier, and the spirit of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. I should not forget to mention that they also sought the help of the Queen of the Fairies and various angels. It is clear from Wharton's diary that he was mentally ill, but to what extent all or some of his accounts are the imaginings of a disturbed mind is difficult to gauge.[20] It is certainly the case that he was the dupe of Mary Parish's cunning and invention. Yet it is important to point out that the descriptions and accounts she gave him of ghosts, fairies and angels were 'realistic' or feasible in the context of those who clung to the Neoplatonic conception of the spirit world during the late seventeenth century.

GHOST PREVENTION

It would seem that, until the rise of spiritualism in the nineteenth century, the main reason for wishing to encounter the dead was in order to banish them rather than to seek their spiritual guidance. But before discussing the exorcism of ghosts it is necessary to consider strategies employed to prevent ghosts from appearing in the first place. This usually involved treating the corpses of potential ghosts, such as those of suicides and murderers, in ways that physically and symbolically hindered their passage between the worlds of the living and the dead. This could be achieved by dismembering the corpse, pinning or staking it to the ground, or weighing it down under water – all practices that had been employed back in the prehistoric period and in later Pagan and Christian times. While in early modern Europe such solutions were most associated with the physical hampering of vampires and the walking dead, in other words reanimated corpses,[21] such eschatological treatments also served to prevent the return of the *spirits* of the dead. A range of other prophylactic rituals were also enacted on the continent. In early modern Sweden, for example, several criminal trials resulted from 'unchristian' practices to prevent hauntings. In one instance, in 1714, a widow walked in front of her husband's funeral procession with her petticoat pulled over her head and then threw it over the grave to stop her husband's ghost from returning. In another case a fire was lit on a road over which a funeral procession had passed to ward off the potential ghost. There were several suicide panics in seventeenth-century Bavaria, with corpses being dug up to deter troublesome ghosts and avoid divine wrath. In one instance a court ordered that the corpse of a female suicide, which had been buried in a pasture, be exhumed and cremated after locals complained that the milkmaids were fearful of her ghost and refused to work in the field.[22]

As will be discussed in a later chapter, the popular belief in the walking dead had disappeared in England by the Reformation, yet as we have already seen the staking down of suicides continued into the nineteenth century. The legal and religious rationale for the practice was couched purely in the secular terms of a social and moral deterrent. As John Weever explained in 1631, suicides were buried in the highway 'with a stake thrust through their bodies, to terrifie all passengers, by that so infamous and reproachfull a burial, not to make such their finall passage out of this world'. To this end the stake was sometimes left exposed on the surface as a long-term reminder.[23] But while the general populace no doubt recognised this authoritarian message, it is likely that they also conceptualised such profane burial as security against wandering spirits.

Another prophylactic burial practice found in England and elsewhere was the interment of suspect corpses face down in graves. Archaeologists have discovered numerous such prone burials dating to the Roman period. At a Cirencester cemetery, 10 per cent of the interments were of this type, and 14 such burials were excavated at a London burial ground; two of the skeletons also had large stone blocks placed on their backs. A few have been found in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, where they also tend to be in the deepest graves, but there is little archaeological evidence that the tradition continued into the second millennium in England.[24] Yet there is some historical and ethnographic evidence that it continued as a means of ghost prevention right through to the twentieth century. The folklorist Ella Leather was informed about a man at Longtown, Herefordshire, who in justifying his belief in ghosts remarked: 'I helped myself to turn a man in his grave, up at Capel-y-fin; he come back, and we thought to stop him, but after we turned him he come back seven times worse.' The event, if true, must have taken place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Another folklorist remembered as a child listening to a group of Somerset sextons discussing their business. One of them, who was also a village carpenter and coffin-maker, said he secretly turned over the corpses of infamous locals before nailing down their coffin lids. 'This action was apparently well-approved', she noted.[25] That such remembrances of prone burial were not merely the product of hazily remembered idle talk is evident from a report on the treatment of the corpse of the brutal London murderer Nicholas Steinberg, who killed himself in September 1834. The staking of suicides having been prohibited ten years previously, it was evidently felt necessary to enact another means of preventing the man's ghost from rising. So at the Clerkenwell poor ground two men lifted Steinberg's corpse from its cheap coffin, one by the shoulders the other by the feet, and held it over the grave. They then turned the corpse over and dropped it into the grave

face down. The corpse was partially covered with earth and then one of the assistants smashed the head to pieces with a large mallet. Only then was the grave filled.[26]

GHOST LAYERS

> In the first place, he got together the most powerful Exorcisms that he could find; to which, he added some new ones, as by the Bowels of such a *Saint*, the *Bones* of St. *Winnifrede;* and after this, he makes choice of a Place in the Field, near the Thicket of Bushes, whence the Noise came. He draws ye a Circle, a very large one, with several *Crosses* in it, and a phantastical Variety of *Characters;* and all this was perform'd in a *set Form of Words*. He had there also, a great Vessel, full of *Holy Water,* and the *Holy Stole* (as they call it) about his Neck; upon which hung the beginning of the Gospel of St. *John*. He had in his Pockets, a little Piece of *Wax,* which the Bishop of *Rome* us'd to Consecrate once a Year, commonly call'd an *Agnus Die*. With these Arms in time past, they defended themselves against *Evil Spirits*.[27]

Such was the method of exorcising a ghost recounted in a seventeenth-century translation of Erasmus's humorous story concerning an English priest's encounter with a supposed ghost, written in the 1520s. Although the Dutch Catholic theologian's account was intended to be satirical, it probably accurately represented the mix of orthodox and quasi-magical ritual methods employed by some of the Catholic clergy of the time.[28] The portrayal would have struck a chord with English Puritans. Protestant reformers considered such practices as typical Catholic 'superstition', and English Canon Law forbade exorcism in 1604. Article 72 stated that no ministers were 'to attempt upon any Pretence whatsoever, either of Possession or Obsession, by Fasting and Prayer to cast out any Devil or Devils, under pain of the Imputation of Imposture or Cozenage, and Deposition from the Ministery'.[29] There was no mention of ghosts because orthodox Protestant theology taught that the spirits of the dead did not return unless God so desired it, and, if he did so, it was for a divine purpose not to be interfered with.

The Anglican clergy were therefore prevented from providing what had been an important service aiding the laity in their regular struggle against the torments of malignant spirits. Yet as part of their pastoral duties many Protestant clergymen continued to receive requests to 'lay' spirits, as exorcism was popularly known. How could they help? In his *Daemonologie* King James provided some authoritative guidance on cleansing haunted houses:

> By two meanes may onely the remeid [remedy] of such things be procured: The one is ardent prayer to God, both of these persons that are troubled with them, and of that Church whereof they are. The other is the purging of themselves by amendment of life from such sinnes, as have procured that extraordinarie plague.[30]

There is evidence that in possession cases some of the Anglican clergy, particularly Puritan ones, did engage in fasting and ardent prayer before and after 1604, even if it transgressed the wording of Article 72.[31] Meanwhile, evangelical Nonconformist ministers, who were not bound by Canon Law, were particularly prominent in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century instances. The Welsh Independent minister Edmund Jones related how in 1758 some clergymen from Bangor tried to deal with a house plagued by a stone-throwing spirit. Jones said:

> they did their best with a good design, but they were also beaten and obliged to go away. Reading prayers was too weak a means to drive an enraged evil Spirit away. There was a necessity of some persons of a strong faith, who had the Spirit and gift of prayer in some great measure.[32]

It was not what was said but how it was said that mattered – an important distinction from Catholic exorcism.

Popular literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also reinforced the continued role of the clergy in dealing with troublesome spirits. A pamphlet of 1674 reported how a parish minister was called in to deal with a malicious spirit that ripped clothes and fabrics at the house of a gentlewoman in London Wall. This 'worthy and learned person' went to prayer in the house and then gave 'the Woman and her Sister Encouragements from Gods word to strengthen their Faith, to resist the Tempter'.[33] There is, it must be said though, frustratingly little concrete evidence of the clergy laying ghosts. Cases of clerical intervention were usually concerned with domestic poltergeist activity, which up until the nineteenth century was generally interpreted as either manifestations of witchcraft or of satanic interference rather than the spirits of the dead. Ghosts could either be avoided by staying clear of haunted locations or disappeared from their own volition once their task had been completed.

In northern England, where the Catholic faith persisted most strongly following the Reformation, the tentative efforts of the Protestant clergy in combating spirits were popularly contrasted with the efficacious exorcisms of the old Church. The Newcastle curate Henry Bourne observed in 1725 that it was 'common for the present Vulgar to say, none can lay a Spirit but a *Popish*

Priest'.[34] The Rev. John Atkinson observed that in the mid nineteenth century Anglican parsons were still called 'Church-priests' in the district of Danby, Yorkshire. He remembered one of his elderly female parishioners requesting him to deal with some spirits that tormented her house. He wrote:

> She told me what spirits they were, and in some instances whose spirits, and what their objects and efforts were. I told her at last I could not, did not profess to 'lay spirits'; and her reply was, 'Ay, but if I had sent for a priest o' t'au'd church, he was a' deean it. They wur a vast mair powerful conjurers than you Church-priests.'[35]

Folk legends rather than priestly activity were instrumental in perpetuating this perception. In 1878, for instance, it was recorded that a Roman Catholic priest had laid the ghost of Hannah Corbridge, of Laneshaw Bridge, near Colne. She was murdered in January 1789, and her spirit had roamed the area where her body was dumped. In Kirkby Lonsdale there was a legend that three Catholic priests had laid a ghost under the local Devil's Bridge.[36]

In the southern half of England there is little evidence of an enduring popular belief in the exorcising powers of Catholic priests. Instead, in contrast with the historical record, the folklore archives are full of stories about the ghost-laying activities of Protestant clergymen. If the legends are to be believed, they were ghost-busting on a regular basis. The most powerful conjuring parsons could take on a ghost single-handedly, but they often performed in groups of nine or twelve. In the mid nineteenth century the villagers of Cumnor, Oxfordshire, believed, for example, that the ghost of Lady Dudley (1532–1560), who had died in suspicious circumstances, was laid by nine Oxford parsons.[37] Sometimes ghosts were said to have been laid in a bottle or some other small container, such as a snuff box, but most ubiquitous was the notion that clergymen banished ghosts to the depths of ponds, echoing perhaps the ancient practice of burying potential restless dead under water. Numerous such local legends were recorded in Oxfordshire in the late nineteenth century. It was said, for instance, that the restless spirit of a woman who had committed suicide by drowning herself in a pond at Stanton Harcourt Manor, was finally laid to rest in the pond by some parsons who ensured that it never subsequently dried up. Around 40 years before, some clergymen apparently laid several ghosts in a well at Woodperry House.[38] Similar tales were recorded all over the country. A spirit that haunted a large barn in Walford, Berkshire, was banished to a fish pond by twelve clergymen who stood in a circle and read a psalm, and further tempted the spirit with two live cockerels, which it tore to pieces with relish. A similar legend was known in Long Crendon, Buckinghamshire,

where the ghost of a woman, who vowed to torment a thief, was laid to rest by twelve clergymen who prayed backwards and proffered a dove instead of cockerels.[39] In the West Country ghosts were also banished to perform endless tasks to keep them occupied, such as the troublesome ghost of an eighteenth-century mayor of Okehampton who was laid in Cranmere Pool, Dartmoor, and ordered to bale it out with a sieve. Others were set the impossible task of spinning ropes of sand.[40]

There was an enduring tradition that the safest place to send a ghost was the Red Sea. The earliest reference I have found to it in popular tradition is in a deposition taken in 1650 from an Essex alehouse servant named Susan Lay, who complained of being haunted by the ghost of her mistress. Susan told a friend that to be rid of it she would have to 'conjure' the ghost 'into the red sea or else she would be her destruction'.[41] Joseph Addison incorporated the same notion in his humorous play on the ghost of the Tedworth Drummer, which was first performed in 1715. In one passage several of the characters discuss how a cunning-man could deal with the troublesome spirit by capturing it within a magical circle drawn on the ground. 'If the conjurer be but well paid,' says one, 'he'll take pains upon the ghost, and lay him, look ye, in the Red Sea – and then he's laid for ever.' Another replies, 'Why, John, there must be a power of spirits in that same Red Sea – I warrant ye, they are as plenty as fish.'[42] Later in the century the student of 'vulgar' beliefs Francis Grose noted humorously that in many instances ghosts had 'most earnestly besought the exorcists not to confine them in that place. It is nevertheless considered an indisputable fact, that there are an infinite number laid there.'[43] The enduring tradition of Red Sea ghost-laying is evident from several references in the folklore record of the early twentieth century. A Wiltshire folklorist, writing in 1901, recorded a local legend of how a ghost begged a parson not to lay it in the Red Sea, while in Somerset the ghost of a wicked old man of West Harptree was first laid for a period of seven years by the local vicar, but when the allotted time expired he turned up again to annoy the locals. This time the vicar cast it into the Red Sea.[44]

Such local legends often accrued around real clergymen. Some evidently attracted reputations in their own lifetimes but it is likely new legends were generated long after their deaths. In 1823 it was noted that Richard Dodge, Vicar of Talland, Cornwall, who died in 1746, 'had the reputation of being deeply skilled in the black art, and could raise ghosts, or send them into the Red Sea, at the nod of his head'. Stories of his exploits still circulated at the end of the nineteenth century.[45] Fifty years after the death of the Rev. Hudson, vicar of West Harptree, Somerset (1837–42), a legend circulated of how he laid a ghost by putting a door key in the Bible and reading the Lord's Prayer

backwards.[46] Fame could be long-lived. In the late nineteenth century, tales were still being told of the ghost-laying exploits of the Rev. Thomas Flavel, vicar of Mullion, Cornwall, who died in 1682.[47] Some of the clergy no doubt encouraged their reputation for spirit laying. The Rev. Richard Polwhele, writing in 1826, said he 'could mention the names of several persons, whose influence over their flock was solely attributable to this circumstance'.[48] There is little evidence, though, that the Anglican clergy employed unorthodox or magical means, as some of the legends would have us believe. It is highly unlikely that Hudson read the Lord's Prayer backwards, or that Parson Woods of Ladock cast out ghosts and spirits with an ebony stick engraved with planetary signs and magical symbols.[49]

It has been argued persuasively that historical processes and social change are reflected in the similar ubiquity and activities of ghost-laying ministers in the narrative legends of nineteenth-century Lutheran Denmark. In particular, the failure of ministers to lay ghosts, which represents around 17 per cent of a corpus of several hundred legends, with a further 21 per cent having an ambiguous resolution, are interpreted as representing an erosion of church authority at the national and parochial level.[50] While the English corpus of legends is not so extensive, we may be able to identify some historical messages – it obviously reflects the enduring influence of the Catholic faith and the activities of its priests in the popular traditions of northern England. As in Denmark, the power and influence of the established church in England was eroding during the nineteenth century. However, one does not get a similar sense of this being reflected in the English ghost-laying legends from southern and western England. In contrast with the Danish material, the clergy are nearly always successful, though it may be significant that the effort was often portrayed as a collective clerical action. The forces of secularism and declining church attendance were a particularly urban phenomenon, and so the legends, perhaps, reflect the continued rural perception of the Anglican clergy as a protective, unifying parochial force.

In early modern and modern England there were various lay folk who also professed to have special knowledge or powers to exorcise spirits, and who, unfettered by the professional constraints of Canon Law, made use of tried and tested Catholic exorcisms and rituals. However, as with clerical exorcism, cases of cunning-folk or other individuals offering to expel the spirits of the dead, as distinct from exorcising the possessed or relieving those persecuted by witches, are rare. For the early modern period we have to turn to the unreliable source of popular literature for detailed accounts of lay ghost-laying. In a 1679 report of the ghost of a murdered young man near Stamford that tormented

the household of his brother, who had organised his murder, the astrologer called in to lay the ghost is presented as unprofessionally unprepared. When the ghost, with its blood-stained clothing appeared to him, it 'so amazed the Conjurer, that not withstanding his Maganminous art, he did begin to fly the Room, when as the Spirit bid him not to fear, though it was not in his power to lay him, till his blood was by Justice answered for'.[51]

Another pamphlet concerned the ghost of a recently deceased baker named Powel who haunted his former house and garden in Southwark in 1661. He appeared in various animal guises as well as in human form, 'his Eyes half sunk in his Head, his Face extraordinary Black, and in the same Cloaths he used to wear when he was alive'. The hideous noises Powel's ghost made caused his son Thomas to abandon the house, leaving only the servant to look after it. Word of the haunting soon reached the ears of some 'conjurers'. They stayed in the house night and day, 'Using all possible means they can to lay this troubled Spirit, and are continually reading and making of Circles, burning of Wax Candles, and Juniper-wood.' Their first attempts failed, but one night,

> Having made a great Circle in the Garden, the Spirit of Master Powel appeared, to whom one of them said: 'We conjure thee to depart to thy place of Rest.' He answered, 'Wo be to those that were the cause of my coming hither.' The rest (being eight in number) kept close to their Books, and fain would have brought him into the Circle, but could not; whereupon one of them said, 'The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the Devil': which caused him to vanish away.[52]

Powel's ghost was merely interrupted rather than vanquished and it continued to torment the household. Rumours soon spread that the ghost was guarding a hidden stash of money and Thomas began digging about the place. It took a man-to-spirit conversation with a local minister to resolve the haunting. The clergyman asked the ghost, 'In the Name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost', why he had departed his heavenly slumber. Powel's spirit replied that the cause was 'about a Grand-Daughter of his, whom he desired might have satisfaction from the Dead, it having been some way unjustly dealt by before his Departure.'

A couple of decades later another pamphlet reported how 'one who pretended to be a Cunning-Man' had sought to meet the ghost of a gentleman that disturbed the occupants of his former residence in Middlesex. The occupants had employed 'Ministers and others' to lay the ghost with initial success, but several months later it returned to haunt the house. Knowledge of the

haunting spread around the neighbourhood and came to the attention of the cunning-man who, accompanied by a two or three acquaintances and several bottles of wine, undertook to stay the night at the haunted house. As part of his spiritual protection he placed two crossed swords at the entrance to the room in which they kept their watch. It apparently worked, for at midnight the ghost was seen to pass by the room and look through the entrance but did not enter. Up until this point in the haunting the ghost had been harmless but the cunning-man's meddling seems to have upset it, for now it began to pull the bedding off the servants' beds and even pinched and bruised one of them. The master of the house consequently expressed his intent to invite some divines to quieten the ghost.[53]

These popular accounts of non-clerical attempts to lay ghosts served not only as scary entertainment and confirmation of the reality of ghosts, they also provided useful information on how to deal with them. As one popular pamphlet, *A Whip for the Devil*, which provided a helpful series of exorcisms, remarked, 'Paper works Miracles. The Devil dares no more come near a Stationers Heaps, or a Printers Work-house, than some men dare put their Noses into a Cheesemongers Shop.'[54] This was actually a facetious observation and the ostensible aim of *A Whip* was to denounce papist 'superstition', but the author must have known full well that his exposé of exorcism could also serve as a valuable practical manual for would-be ghostbusters. It provided detailed instructions on how to exorcise haunted houses, including the following 'Prayer to be said when you come to the place haunted':

> Give ear, O Lord, to our supplications, and enlighten this house with the eyes of thy goodness, and let thy blessing descend upon the inhabitants thereof, that abiding with safety in this habitation, they may be thy habitation also.[55]

As the accounts provided above show, though, the seventeenth-century pamphlets stories portrayed cunning-folk as ineffective ghost-layers. Their magic was either insufficient or they did not have the spiritual or moral authority to command the spirits of the dead. The negative portrayal is understandable considering the authoritarian denunciations of magical practitioners at the time and the prohibition of spirit conjuration. The paucity of nineteenth-century legends regarding lay exorcists, compared with the profusion of clergymen, suggests that the weakness presented in the biased early modern literature was also engrained in oral tradition. Ghost-laying was evidently one area of supernatural interventionism where the Anglican clergy had a decided edge over cunning-folk in popular perception.

NOISY HAUNTINGS AND THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH

Noisy ghosts or poltergeists have always attracted the most intellectual attention. The spirits concerned responded to and interacted with the interventions of the living. Such hauntings were about public spectacle, and treated by some as dramatic entertainment. But poltergeist activity also drew those seeking answers to profound theological and philosophical questions. If the manifestations could be found to be free of trickery then it was firm proof of the reality of the spirit world. Then came the question of what types of spirit were responsible: devils, witches or ghosts? It was from the mid seventeenth century onwards, when Neoplatonism was beginning to crumble, that poltergeist activity assumed considerable importance as a battleground for competing philosophical discourses. The most influential focus of debate was the case of the Tedworth Drummer.[56]

In 1662–63 the house of a gentleman named John Mompesson, who lived at Tedworth (Tidworth), Wiltshire, was plagued by strange noises, smells and lights. Most curious of all, a drum that had been confiscated from a vagrant drummer and petty conjurer named William Dury, who had been arrested for possessing fake documentation, began to emanate beats and even banged out whole tattoos. Dury was an obvious suspect for causing the disruption, but for some of the time Dury was locked up in Gloucester gaol on an unrelated charge. It was a mystery. Could Dury have been exacting revenge by using magical powers? Was it the Devil making mischief? A neighbour told Mompesson's wife that the fairies sometimes paid visits to humans to leave money. Glanvill was told by a curious Somerset physician that 'it was nothing but a Rendezvouz of Witches, and that for an hundred pounds, he would undertake to rid the House of all disturbance'.[57]

As usual, the balladeers were quick to make capital out of the events with *A Wonder of Wonders* telling in verse the 'true relation of the strange and invisible beatings of a drum'. The case came to achieve enduring fame, however, due to an account published in Glanvill's *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (1668), while an oft-repeated version appeared later in *Saducismus Triumphatus* (1681). But at the time, word of mouth effectively spread news of the occurrences and before long Mompesson was being inundated with visitors from the clergy, gentry and aristocracy. Anthony Ettrick, a lawyer and close friend of John Aubrey, stayed in the house one night with Sir Ralph Bankes. They did so 'out of curiosity, to be satisfied. They did hear sometimes knockings; and if they said "Devill, knock so many knocks," so many knocks would be answered.'[58] Sir Thomas Chamberlain was amongst a company of gentlemen present when the drummer complied with a request 'to give five knocks and no more that

night'.[59] Two members of the royal court, the second Earl of Chesterfield and the Earl of Falmouth, were sent down to Tedworth on behalf of the king. They were both sceptical, as were other members of court such as Lord Sandwich. Such were the numbers wishing to see and hear for themselves the antics of the spirit drummer that Mompesson understandably grumbled in a letter, 'These strangers are not onely troublesome and chargeable, but hinder us from doing our duties.'[60] Well-sourced rumours spread that during a meeting with the king, Mompesson had admitted that he had discovered the haunting to be a cheat. However, the reason for him saying as much may have been more due to the inconvenience caused to him by the legions of sightseers. John Wesley's eldest brother, who was at Oxford with Mompesson's son, inquired about the events at his family home, and asked if his father had acknowledged that the whole affair had been a trick played upon them. Mompesson explained that

> The resort of gentlemen to my father's house was so great, he could not bear the expense. He therefore took no pains to confute the report that he had found out the cheat; although he, and I, and all the family, knew the account which was published to be punctually true.[61]

The case of the Tedworth Drummer is second only to the Cock Lane ghost in terms of historic notoriety. A century on from the events at Tedworth, the Cock Lane sensation demonstrates both continuity in terms of the characteristics of the manifestation and the debates that surrounded it, but it also reflected intellectual and cultural changes as well. By now witchcraft had dropped out of the educated discourse regarding such phenomena, and there is little evidence that it was considered relevant to the case by the urban artisans in the surrounding streets. Unlike the Tedworth Drummer, the Cock Lane manifestation had a clear back-story as a ghost haunting, but those seeking confirmation of the spirit world did not rule out the machinations of the Devil. The story has been much told and so there is no need to go over the details in great length.[62] In brief, in January 1762 Elizabeth Parsons, the twelve-year-old daughter of Richard Parsons, landlord of a house in Cock Lane and also parish clerk of Sepulchre's, began to be the focus of mysterious knocking and scratching noises. The first person to be called in was a local carpenter employed by Parsons to remove the wainscoting in Elizabeth's bedroom, but nothing obviously connected with the noises, such as a rat's nest, was found. Parsons next applied to John Moore, the assistant preacher at St Sepulchre's, and a Methodist sympathiser. Moore decided to make contact with what was now considered to be a spirit, and, by knocking once for 'yes' and twice for 'no' on the bedpost in Elizabeth's room, it slowly revealed its terrible story. It was the

ghost of Frances Lynes, the mistress of one William Kent, the husband of her deceased sister. She and Kent had briefly lodged at Parsons' house in 1759. She died in Clerkenwell the following year of what was thought to be smallpox. She was pregnant with Kent's child at the time. Her spirit had decided to return to Parsons' house to reveal that she had, in fact, been poisoned by Kent and wished in traditional ghostly fashion to reveal the murder so that justice would be done. For the sceptical, the fact that Parsons owed Kent money and had been threatened by him with legal action may have had something do with the ghost's appearance in his house and its grave accusation. Several decades had passed since any of the magistracy would have acted on ghost evidence, but Parsons may have only wished to have Kent's reputation publicly debased.

Reports of the events in Cock Lane spread quickly both by word of mouth through the streets of London and also via the newspapers. Kent sued the editor of the *Royal Chronicle* for libel after it published 'An authentic narrative' of the haunting, which 'raised groundless Suspicions concerning the Death of the said Frances Lynes'.[63] While the locals crowded round the building day after day, a succession of the great and the good drew up in their carriages to inspect the latest supernatural wonder. One of them was Horace Walpole who turned up one morning, but left frustrated and dismissive: 'the ghost was not expected until seven, when there are only 'prentices and old women'.[64] Moore called in fellow clergymen to bolster his own conviction of the veracity of the ghost. Those with Methodist leanings were notable by their presence. One who, after attending seances with 'scratching Fanny', came to believe in the ghost was the Rev. Thomas Broughton (1712–1777), who, although estranged from Wesleyanism, was a well-known evangelical and secretary of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).[65] Another believer was the Rev. Ross who, in the presence of Lord Dartmouth and an eminent surgeon, conversed with Fanny's ghost, seeking to solve a fundamental question regarding the nature of spirit matter. 'Are you clothed in a body?' he asked. The ghost replied with one knock. 'Are you clothed in a body of flesh?' Two knocks. Now to the crucial issue. 'In a body of air?' asked Ross. Two knocks. 'In a body of light?' he enquired. One knock was heard.[66]

It was another clergyman, the Rev. Stephen Aldrich, who organised a formal investigating committee to determine the cause of the Cock Lane manifestation. It included the Rev. John Douglas, a future bishop of Salisbury. His inclusion is understandable considering that in the previous decade he had published a well-received exposé of Catholic miracle healing.[67] There was also Lord Dartmouth, the eminent physician George Macaulay, and Dr Samuel Johnson. Thus learned spiritual, medical and philosophical imperatives were combined. Johnson sent an account of their findings to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the conclusion being

that no other agency was responsible other than the clever counterfeit noise making of Elizabeth Parsons. A sceptical pamphleteer on the case urged that such impostors 'ought immediately to be pilloried' otherwise 'new Impostures will be continually starting up in other Parts of the Town and Country'.[68] Kent subsequently prosecuted the Parsons and Moore for conspiracy to take away his life by accusing him of murder. Local public opinion, however, was evidently far more ready to believe in Scratching Fanny. When Parsons appeared in the pillory three times as part of his two-year prison sentence he was not subjected to the usual abuse and refuse flung at the pilloried. On the contrary, collections were taken for his benefit.[69]

Scratching Fanny became a byword for fraud and 'Cock Lane' was the cynical cry when new knocking ghosts came to the attention of the press. Well-reported cases of supposed possession or poltergeist activity continued to attract large crowds, but senior members of the religious and medical establishment, and the intelligentsia generally, became more reluctant to investigate. Debunking became a tiresome and unnecessary exercise for sceptics, while those who liked to keep an open mind feared being mocked for having an overly fond interest in such matters. Insinuations of Methodist credulity were quick to be directed at those who visited haunted houses. In 1772 the anonymous author of a sober report on the strange noises and missiles that plagued the house of a gentlewoman named Mary Golding, of Stockwell, Surrey, recognised that, regarding the details he furnished, 'we cannot be at all surprised the public should be doubtful of the truth of them, more especially as there has been too many impositions of this sort'. The author refrained from mentioning any hint of spirit involvement, and wished only that 'this extraordinary affair may be unravelled'.[70] Such caution, even by an anonymous author, indicates how sensitive earnest inquiry regarding ghosts had become in and around the capital.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the haunting refrain of 'remember Cock Lane', modest, local investigations continued to be launched around the country whenever an outbreak of poltergeist activity took place. With the expansion of the regional press by the end of the century, county newspapers increasingly took on the role of enlightenment crusaders, exposing ghost frauds, instructing the 'superstitious', and thereby defending the provinces from condescending metropolitan assumptions regarding rural backwardness. There is no better example of this than the Sampford Ghost sensation. In the summer of 1810 the house and general supplies shop of John Chave, in the Devon village of Sampford Peverell, near Tiverton, was the setting for an attack of poltergeist activity. There were knockings and footsteps, most of which focused, as so often, around a teenage servant girl named Sally Case. She was the focus of

particularly violent attacks, having bruising invisible blows rained down upon her. On two occasions she managed briefly to catch hold of the spirit molester and described it as feeling like a dog or a rabbit. Another time she saw the white apparition of a man's arm. A servant boy was frightened one night to see a vision of an old woman. The case would have remained a low-key affair but for the intervention of the rector of Prior's Portion, Tiverton, the Rev. Charles Caleb Colton (1777–1832).

Colton was a curious and eccentric character. He had been educated at Eton and Cambridge and his father had been the canon of Salisbury. But the spiritual duties of his position were not always on his mind. He was an inveterate gambler and seemed to prefer fishing to preaching. After having spent six nights at the Chave's home, and being perplexed by the phenomena he experienced, on 18 August he gave an affidavit, signed before the Mayor of Tiverton and three local surgeons. In it he stated:

> with a mind perfectly unprejudiced, after the most minute investigation, and closest inspection of all the premises, I am utterly unable to account for any of the phenomenon I have seen and heard, and labour at this moment under no small perplexity, arising from a determination not likely to admit of supernatural interference.[71]

As in the Stockwell pamphlet there was no attempt to explain the phenomena explicitly in terms of spirits or devils, though in a letter to the *Taunton Courier* Colton observed:

> It is not the object of this letter to make converts to a belief in Ghosts; yet, were the existence of such supernatural Beings established, I am apt to suspect the effects produced by such a persuasion, (if any) would be rather favourable to virtue, than otherwise.[72]

The fact that Colton chose to produce a popular narrative of the mysterious events with the title *Sampford Ghost*, suggests that he may have had an eye on its commercial prospects.[73] In response, John Marriott, the editor of the *Taunton Courier*, the main newspaper covering Somerset and east Devon at that time, decided it was necessary to fight back on behalf of the rationalist cause, even though Colton had been careful to highlight his own sceptical inclinations. The various exchanges between the two through the newspapers and in pamphlets were also reprinted in the national press, giving the case and the locality considerable notoriety.[74]

In his *Sampford Ghost!!!*, John Marriott set out his case that the haunting was a hoax perpetrated by Chave, his brother-in-law William Tayler, Sally Case, and a local cooper named James Dodge. Most of his evidence derived from an account of the investigation by a local property owner named Talley, who caught Taylor and Dodge in very suspicious locations when the manifestations were happening, and spotted tell-tale dent marks on the ceiling below Sally's chamber as if it had been hit with a blunt instrument. It was also alleged that Tayler had received lessons on slight-of-hand tricks and illusion from the well-known stage magician Moon who toured around the region. Tayler admitted he had met Moon twice but had never received any tuition.[75] On the 27 September Chave, Tayler, Dodge and Case also signed affidavits before the mayor of Tiverton denying any knowledge of fraud and insisting on the veracity of the inexplicable manifestations. Colton responded to Marriott in another edition of the *Sampford Ghost* with the subtitle 'Stubborn facts against vague assertions', in which he accused the editor of 'gross misrepresentations'. The affair died down after a few months, though one imagines it caused considerable, long-term social disruption to the people of Sampford Peverell who found themselves having to decided whether they were pro- or anti-Chave. Colton moved away a few years later and went on to achieve some literary and gambling success during sojourns in America and France, but shot himself in 1832 rather than face a major surgical operation. The nature of his death made him a good candidate to return to the living in spirit form, though there is no record of him ever being seen.

Colton implied he believed in ghosts, but in the climate of the time refrained from explicitly defending the notion. The sensitivities of the subject were evident four years later when a neighbouring clergyman, the Rev. William Vowles, wrote a pamphlet denouncing another noisy haunting, this time in the house of a 'respectable yeoman', Mr Taylor, who lived in Tiverton parish. It was based on a sermon Vowles had given at the Steps Meeting House, an Independent chapel in Tiverton, attacking the popular belief in apparitions and supernatural voices. There was nothing equivocal in his position. For Vowles the idea of ghosts was 'not only absurd, it is pernicious and pregnant with evil … Spectres and ghosts are some of the vile spawn of idolatry.' They were merely the result of 'visual deceptions, dreams, opium, night-mare, and the horrors of guilt'. This damning denunciation was inspired by his inquiry into the strange sounds and voices experienced in the Taylor's house following the death of Mr Taylor's daughter, Ann, who had lain in a trance for several days. A record of the pious dreams she had during this time was printed for popular consumption, and disseminated widely. Vowles dismissed it as abounding in 'excessive absurdities', but 1814 was a good time to be peddling

such accounts of religious visions and the afterlife, for it was the year that the Devon prophetess and spirit-communicator Joanna Southcott amazed the country with the announcement that she was going to give birth to Shiloh, the son of God who would redeem and rule all nations. To mark the event there was a rush of chapbooks and broadsides about the prophetess and her revelations.[76] Vowles suspected the Taylor's servant girl was responsible for the phenomena that occurred after Ann's death, and following the publication of the first edition of his pamphlet he received communications from two other families that had employed the girl. During her stay their houses had also been subjected to the 'vagaries of some frantic but invisible and undiscovered agent' – 'vagaries not unlike those acted on the *darkened* theatre of Sampford of ghostly renown'. Only when she left did they stop.[77]

What staunch rationalist consensus there was by the early nineteenth century did not last long. Several decades before the advent of modern spiritualism in 1848, two developments, one scientific and the other religious, heralded a new educated engagement with the spirits of the dead. The theory of animal magnetism or mesmerism, propounded by the Viennese doctor Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815), had considerable influence in certain intellectual and scientific circles.[78] In essence, the theory was that the universe was infused with an invisible, fluidic substance that connected all matter. It provided what seemed like the first serious scientific explanation for the possibility of spirit communication since the Neoplatonic theories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The need to investigate supposed spirit manifestations accrued new relevance. If natural causes or fraud could not be detected, then noisy hauntings held out the prospect for serious analysis of possible mesmeric forces at work. Mesmerism's popularity required the intellectual sceptics to re-energise their interest in practical investigation rather than merely debunking from their armchairs. It is in this context, perhaps, that we can situate the reaction to a haunting in Clewer, near Windsor, in June 1841. A household was plagued by mysterious violent knockings and rappings against the door of their water closet. A policeman who had been asked to watch over the house detected no obvious explanation for the noises. The haunting caused a sensation in the area and was reported widely in the press. A 'scientific gentleman' from London, who read of the events in a national newspaper, paid three visits to try and discover a rational cause. The floorboards of the closet were removed and both the floor and the area around the closet were excavated to a depth of several feet. He then had the drain exposed and examined. The water in an adjoining ditch was even sent for analysis. Next the local gravedigger was employed to use his sounding iron to sound the ground around the closet, but nothing unusual was detected. Only when the tenants of the house moved out did the

haunting cease, leading to the suspicion that it was all a trick by a member of the household.[79]

The religious environment of England was changing during the first half of the nineteenth century. Methodism, in its various manifestations, became a major religious and social force as middle- and working-class membership expanded massively. In the face of the denunciations heaped upon them for their credulity regarding the spirit world, many members subscribed to John Wesley's view that absolute proof of just one instance of spirit communication was sufficient to confirm that the age of miracles was not over. The growth in earnest spiritualist interest during the 1840s, which seems to be linked to the success of Methodism and other evangelical denominations, is evident from the publication of a series of pamphlets on different spiritual and providential phenomena. In 1846 a tract warning of backsliding amongst Wesleyans used the vehicle of Wesley's ghost appearing to admonish his followers. The cover engraving, with its image of Wesley in a white sheet appearing to a surprised follower seated by a fireside, borrowed from the imagery of two centuries of popular ghost literature.[80] A few years earlier the Wesleyan minister Robert Young published a much reprinted pamphlet recording his person testimony of the trance visions of the afterlife experienced by a Miss D., who resided in a British colony. While in her entranced state, between life and death, she was taken on a tour of heaven and hell by her guardian angel, and saw those of her acquaintance who had only just died.[81] Then there was the case of Mary Jobson. In 1839 this sickly thirteen-year-old girl was the focus for the usual knockings, footsteps, and slamming doors, but those who came to investigate were not looking for proof of the Devil, for as the manifestations developed it became clear to some of those investigating that the agents behind these were benign, heavenly denizens. Indeed the Virgin Mary spoke to her and spirit voices provided member of the household with uplifting religious messages. The apparition of a lamb appeared on one occasion, another time a man surrounded by radiance. One of those who investigated and came to the conclusion that these were truly visitants from the afterlife was the respected physician William Reid Clanny (1776–1850).[82] At the time he was senior physician at Sunderland infirmary, but earlier in life he had achieved considerable acclaim for inventing a sealed candle lamp – a forerunner of the Davy lamp – that helped minimise colliery explosions. The fact that he was prepared to publish an account of the affair and endorse the reality of the spiritual manifestations indicates that, despite the inevitable mockery to which he would be subjected in some quarters, he also felt that he had sufficient middle-class peer support as well. Indeed, he asserted that many members of

the Anglican church as well as ministers of other denominations were also satisfied with the evidence.

It is against this background of spiritual investigation and revelation that we should consider the interest generated by the more traditional haunting of Willington Mill, in Willington Quay, a town situated on the Tyne. The haunting began in 1835 and continued until the owner, a Quaker named Joseph Proctor, and his family left in 1847. There were the typical footsteps, bangings, rattling of windows and moving of beds but also ghost sightings. A transparent, white female figure was seen in a window of the house on one occasion and also a luminous priest in a white surplice. Procter wrote in his diary, 'even in modern times, amidst a thousand creations of fancy, fear, fraud, or superstition, there still remain some well-attested instances in which good or evil spirits have manifested their presence by sensible tokens'.[83] Clanny, who lived some ten miles south, seems to have known of the case, but there is no record of his visiting. However, in July 1840 a medical acquaintance, Dr Edward Drury and a friend, T. Hudson, were given permission by Procter to sit up all night in the house and await any manifestations of the spirit or spirits. Just before one o'clock in the morning the household was awoken by a terrible shriek from Drury. As he later recounted in a letter, he saw 'the figure of a female attired in greyish garments, with the head inclined downwards, and one hand pressed upon the chest, as if in pain, and the other, viz., the right hand, extended towards the floor, with the finger pointing downwards'. As it stood before him in its suspiciously classic pose, Drury made a rush for it but felt nothing and collapsed in a faint.

The Willington case attracted considerable fame. In 1842 the Newcastle bookseller and publisher Moses Aaron Richardson published a supportive *Authentic Account of a Visit to the Haunted House at Willington*, and reprinted it along with the correspondence between Drury and Procter in his *Local Historian's table book: of Remarkable Occurrences* (Newcastle, 1841–46). In 1847 William Howitt, the Quaker writer and publisher, also reproduced parts of Richardson's account, along with his own description of the setting, in his short-lived periodical *Howitt's Journal*. 'We have of late years settled it as an established fact, that ghosts and haunted houses were the empty creations of ignorant times', Howitt observed. Yet the haunting of such a respectable family, in the face of 'the incredulity of the wise, the investigations of the curious', could not be easily dismissed. When Catherine Crowe reprinted an account of Howitt's and Richardson's reports in her bestselling collection of ghost stories *The Night Side of Nature*, she described it as 'one of the most remarkable cases of haunting in modern times'.[84] This glut of published accounts of spiritual visitations was too much for one anonymous author who wrote a counterblast to Clanny, Young, Richardson and the editor

of the *Wesleyan Magazine*, condemning and debunking what he called a rash of modern miracles.[85]

Mesmerism and Methodism may have created a sympathetic atmosphere for spiritual inquiry but it was spiritualism that made ghost investigation a mainstream intellectual pursuit again. It allowed the Anglican clergy more freedom to pursue their interest in the subject, while a new breed of gentlemen psychical investigators joined them and the medical fraternity in investigating haunted houses. Societies sprang up to provide a sober, impartial vehicle for assessing the evidence for the return of the dead. In 1851, members of Cambridge University founded the Ghost Club. Another Ghost Club was established in 1862 by a group of respected London gentlemen, including the Rev. Llewellyn Davies, Canon of Westminster.[86] The following year it apparently advertised for access to a well-reputed haunted house that it could investigate thoroughly on its own terms.[87] As the fires of scepticism and puzzlement inspired by the first wave of spiritualist phenomena died down, both groups seem to have fizzled out. Still, in 1879 some Oxford University students formed the Oxford Phasmatological Society, which existed until 1885, and in 1882 the Ghost Club was revived, though this time the composition of its members was more obviously pro-spiritualist.[88] One of its co-founders was the well-known medium Rev. William Stainton Moses. It functioned as a monthly dining club, with each member having to provide each year one 'original Ghost Story, or some psychological experience of interest or instruction'.[89] Although the Ghost Club would go on to have a long though interrupted life, it was the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), also founded in 1882, that was to be at the forefront of rigorous investigation regarding the spirit world. One of its first major inquiries was into haunted houses, and the debate over the reality of ghosts and spiritualism dominated the pages of its *Journal* and *Proceedings* during the 1880s and 1890s.[90] The history of the SPR has been discussed in great detail elsewhere, and there is no need to repeat it here.[91] Suffice it to say for the moment that the majority of its founding members soon came to the conclusion that the spirits of the dead did not appear to the living.

The role of the press in ghost investigations also changed under the influence of spiritualism. The unanimity newspapers had shown at the beginning of the century in dismissing and debunking hauntings was broken. Some editors, most notably William Thomas Stead of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, adopted a sympathetic stance towards the spiritualist movement.[92] Similar sympathies were also expressed in the editorials of some of the regional press, such as in George Pulman's *Pulman's Weekly News*, which served parts of Somerset, Devon and Dorset. He may not have been outspoken on the issue like Stead, but he liked to keep an open and impartial mind regarding spirit phenomena. This is apparent

from the reports he published on a haunting at a farmhouse in Muchelney, Somerset, in the summer of 1868. Bangs, blows, slamming doors, shaking walls and moving furniture tormented the inhabitants. One of the first reports on the case was printed in the sceptical *Somerset County Herald*, which received so many accounts of the manifestation from readers that it decided it could 'scarcely venture to publish them without making enquiries'.[93] More than a month later, after a lull, the haunting began again. In an update the *Somerset County Herald* reported that

> scores of visitors have flocked to the house, and the inmates have been dreadfully annoyed by silly questions and absurd requests … several religious zealots have visited the house, and there is a rumour that three of the number have since been holding special meetings to exorcise the hobgoblin.[94]

At this stage Pulman sent a correspondent to investigate. Having witnessed a mahogany table being smashed by unseen forces and heard violent, inexplicable rappings, he returned convinced that something spiritual was involved. *Pulman's Weekly News* told its readers that it was 'sheer folly to pooh-pooh the affair'. It asserted that it was 'very different from the Cock Lane Ghost' and that it was 'worthy of the most serious attention of the devout and faithful investigator into the marvels and mysteries of Nature'.[95] In a swipe at its competitor and others, the editor of the *Somerset County Herald* ridiculed their interest in the affair, referring to them and others as the 'large number of GULLS far away from the sea coast of Somersetshire'.[96]

URBAN RECREATION

'Respectable' spirit investigators were happy to visit haunted farmhouses and middle-class homes, but they would not be seen dead searching for ghosts in the streets and churchyards of Victorian cities. If they had, they would have found themselves in tumultuous and boisterous company. While the pious or earnest investigator was drawn to haunted bedrooms for profound truths or lies, the urban working classes gathered on the streets for sensation and entertainment. Yet the phenomena that attracted them were often the same. When, in 1852, word spread round Hull that a noisy ghost haunted a lonely tenement in Wellington Lane, between 2,000–3,000 people gathered in the surrounding streets waiting to hear the ghostly knockings. The *Hull Packet* reported:

> Yesterday night, although it was dull, drizzly, and cold, crowd upon crowd besieged the spot, standing, in spite of the cold and wet, 100 yards from the haunted house, anxiously discussing the nature and object of the ghost's visit, and patiently waiting to learn from the police, or those who were fortunate enough to get near the house, 'when it had knocked last.'[97]

What must surely be the biggest ghost hunt ever occurred in July 1874 when a rumour circulated of a sighting in the churchyard of Christ Church, Broadway, Westminster. When an effigy of a ghost, made of white paper, was pinned to a nearby tree, an estimated 5,000–6,000 people gathered nightly to gawp at it.[98]

Word of mouth obviously spread quickly in urban neighbourhoods, but the role of print also helped generate urban ghost hunts. London's daily newspapers, and the rapid spread of dailies in other big towns from the 1850s onwards, meant that a swift momentum of interest could build up regarding the appearance of a ghost, thereby helping shape public perception and involvement in hauntings. During a court case in September 1853, a policeman testified that following the publication of newspaper reports of a ghost at No. 6 Pond Place, Chelsea, the neighbourhood had been in 'a state of uproar'.[99] Even during the first half of the nineteenth century, the publishers of ballads and broadsheets were remarkably quick to convert sensational news into print for local audiences. When, in 1835, the sound of footsteps and draws being opened in an empty architect's office on the corner of Cross Street and St Ann's Street, Manchester, were reported by the landlord of the neighbouring property, the Lord Hill pub, a broadside publisher was quick to pick up on the story, elaborate on it and disseminate it. Within days a thrilling broadside account was being hawked about the streets recounting how the noises were the work of a troubled spirit emanating from the chapel burial ground nearby. It told how five brave men determined to investigate:

> Presently the dreaded sound approached; it appeared to issue from the floor close to them; nothing, however, was to be seen. This was too great a trial for their courage. They simultaneously took to their heels and with all speed rushed into the street to report the awful tidings to an already terrified assemblage of persons who were collected there. Indeed, one of the men has since been heard to declare that he actually thought that his ghostship had got hold of him and was literally tearing him to pieces.

On reading this sensational news, or on it being read to them, it is no wonder large crowds soon gathered. The sober *Manchester Guardian* felt bound to clear

up the mystery by reporting how an investigation by the local superintendent of the watch and his colleagues had proved the haunting was merely an unintentional trick of acoustics.[100]

While it would seem that the composition of such crowds consisted of a cross section of working class and artisan society, the most significant component and often the catalysts for ghost hunts were boys and young men. In early October 1845, for example, the youth of Norwich were much excited by a ghost that had been seen taking a long perambulation, which included walking through a wall before disappearing into a tower. Large crowds gathered in the evenings to see further appearances but were disappointed. A search party of some 400 people was organised, including 'a whole army of little boys, and a pretty fair sprinkling of children of larger growth', to lay siege to the ghost-infested tower, but the spirit was not forthcoming.[101] The prominence of young men is not surprising considering they were often the most conspicuous presence in other boisterous urban street gatherings such as Guy Fawkes celebrations or the institution of communal shaming rituals against moral transgressors such as adulterers.[102] Like these other working-class festive events, the authorities and the press saw ghost hunts as uncouth and vulgar, a disgraceful mix of 'superstition' and a lack of civility. One Victorian Dewsbury magistrate remarked that 'all intelligent and thinking persons' had nothing to do with Fifth of November celebrations.[103] It goes without saying that such 'persons' would also have had nothing to do with ghost hunts. However, the 'problem' of popular credulity was subordinate to the issue of law and order. The crowds were sometimes described as 'mobs' and their behaviour denounced as 'riotous'. Reporting on the ghost seen in Shadwell church in August 1851, the *News of the World* talked of the 'disorderly characters' that assembled nightly in front of the church railings to witness the ghost, and how the affair had 'given rise to a good deal of curiosity and much disorder and rioting'.[104] In May 1865 *The Times* referred to the 'mobs' that gathered between nine o'clock in the evening and four in the morning hoping to see a ghost at St George's Church in Southwark. The crowds were so great that extra police had to be drafted into the area in order to keep the traffic moving in the high street. One man was arrested, Henry Stanley, who had rushed around the place shouting 'Here's the ghost!'[105]

The working classes considered the streets as a valuable social space while the authorities saw them as both conduits of commerce and havens of crime. Conflict was bound to ensue.[106] The police were quick to appear when a ghost sighting attracted crowds, and ghost seekers were ready to show their unhappiness about being moved on when their quarry was potentially in sight. During the Bermondsey ghost sensation of July 1830 some 2,000 people

gathered nightly around a haunted property in Grange Road. An entire police division had to be called in to disperse the crowds. Some strongly expressed their irritation at being moved on, complaining they had walked for miles to catch a glimpse of the ghost.[107] Many of those living in the vicinity of a street haunting understandably considered ghost-hunting crowds, like any such street gathering, an unacceptable disturbance of the peace. In September 1828 *The Sun* reported that, due to a ghost sighting in Percy Street, it was not possible to get from one end of the street to the other in a direct line after sunset. Such were crowds drawn to a reported ghost in Whitechapel church in October 1842, that 'it was almost impossible for a person to pass along the pavement; and it was with no little difficulty the congregation could make their way out of the church gates'.[108]

Crowds were certainly animated and there were usually a number of pot-valiant men and women manifesting their eagerness to take on the spirit world, but press talk of 'mobs' and 'riots' was often an unfair exaggeration of the crowds' behaviour. Still, frustrated ghost seekers, usually young males, sometimes decided to create their own entertainment by resorting to petty vandalism. In June 1867 nine young men were charged before the Bow Street magistrates with creating a disturbance and resisting the police in Woburn Square. For several nights large crowds had gathered after a rumour spread that a ghost was frequenting the area. Nothing spooky having been sighted, some young men started to kick at doors calling for the ghost to appear, causing much annoyance to local inhabitants. When police arrived to seal off the square a mini riot ensued.[109] In 1882, after No. 40 Halsey Street had been abandoned by its owner for several months, rumours began to circulate that it was haunted. For several weeks in September crowds gathered, calling on the ghost to appear, while local schoolchildren targeted the building, throwing stones, ringing the doorbell and throwing filth at it. A neighbour called in the police but they said they were powerless to deal with the disturbance. They eventually acted in a rather feeble manner by arresting a drunken woman amongst the crowd.[110] In July 1876 a machine ruler named Robert Withey, aged 13, was charged with throwing stones at a house that was under repair in Bermondsey, not far from the home of the notorious murderers the Mannings, who had been executed in 1849. Withey was one of a gang of boys, amongst a crowd of some 300–400, who gathered on successive evenings outside the house shouting 'There's the Ghost! There's the black Ghost! There are the Mannings!' Some threatened to tear the haunted house down. At Withey's trial a policeman testified that 'He did not see the elder persons throw stones, but they shouted out "Ghost!" and caused the boys to throw stones.'[111] This echoes an observation regarding Guy Fawkes night aggression in Victorian Oxford, where older townsfolk

encouraged the young men to target undergraduates.[112] It is likely that there was a degree of class resentment in such vicarious pleasure being had from the destruction of property, particularly of the middle classes.

As the main representatives of authority in England's urban streets the police were sometimes drafted in not only to prevent the breaches of the peace that occurred during ghost hunts, but also to investigate the alleged hauntings. By allaying public fears and curiosity they could perform a dual function of debunking ghosts and preserving law and order. Their role in investigating ghosts gives new meaning to the idea of policemen as 'domestic missionaries'. Considerable police time was sometimes expended. In 1859 a policeman did duty for several days in a haunted house in Ashford Road, Maidstone, and at one point a police cordon was placed around the property to detect who was responsible.[113] The Weymouth police made a considerable effort in January 1861 to investigate the strange noises and shaking of crockery emanating from a tenement in East Street, which attracted much public attention. As a sceptical newspaper reported, the ghost could not 'be persuaded to show itself, skulking meanwhile in the wall, and wisely eschewing all intercourse with the police, who have been vainly endeavouring to apprehend the "mysterious" visitant, or at least to detect the cause of the noise'.[114] More successful was PC Thew, who was given the job of diffusing the 1874 Westminster haunting. After a week of crowds disturbing nightly both the traffic and the church congregation, Thew hid himself in the churchyard at midnight and lay in wait for the ghost. His patience was rewarded. He saw a labourer named Frederick Grimmond climb over the railings, place a white sheet over his head and run across the graveyard. Grimmond had the misfortune to stumble over a grave, however, and Thew pounced and arrested him. In court Grimmond lamely explained that he was only looking for the ghost when someone placed the sheet over his head. The magistrate expressed his astonishment that 'people should believe in such things' as ghosts, and rather leniently ordered Grimmond to enter into his own recognisance to be of good behaviour for six months.[115]

By the early decades of the twentieth century, ghost-seeing was no longer a popular urban pastime. This was due in part to the development of more sophisticated strategies for policing urban crowds, but other broader cultural influences were also responsible. Increasing working-class sensibilities regarding authoritarian perceptions of their intellectual abilities, inspired by the growth of mass education, political consciousness and unionism, engendered a self-consciousness of what was and was not respectable in terms of expressing belief in spirits. The attraction of new forms of media, such as the working-class theatre, music hall and film show, also provided novel vehicles for encountering ghosts, albeit representations rather than the real thing.

GHOST HUNTERS

The twentieth century heralded the rise of the 'ghost hunter', the media-friendly, maverick psychic investigator who came to each case with an open mind but who, like any good detective, treated every case as a mystery waiting to be solved rationally. The ghost hunter was not so much driven by the desire to prove profound truths about religion and the human condition – the motivating force for the founders of the SPR – as by the thrill of the hunt and the prospect of perhaps one day finally coming face to face with spirits. One template for the image of the modern ghost hunter was William Hope Hodgson's *Carnacki the Ghost Finder* (1913), which consisted of a series of stories about the exploits of the fictional Edwardian psychic investigator Thomas Carnacki.[116] Even before this was published, Elliott O'Donnell (1872–1965) had already begun to make a name for himself as an authority with books such as *Bona-fide Adventures with Ghosts* (1908). He went on to write more than two dozen books on the subject and was the first to style himself as a 'ghost hunter' in his *Confessions of a Ghost Hunter* published in 1928.

Another *Confessions of a Ghost-Hunter* appeared in 1936, though this time the author was Harry Price (1881–1948), a man who, unlike O'Donnell, created an enduring reputation for himself as a psychic investigator. Gordon Meyrick probably had Price in mind when he penned his 1947 novel *The Ghost Hunters*, which followed the escapades of psychic investigator Arnold Perry. Price's reputation endures partly due to his indefatigable and shrewd investigation of spiritualists, and partly due to his enthusiastic and sometimes compromising engagement with the media. In 1936, for example, he took part in the first live broadcast from a haunted house.[117] On 10 March BBC radio transmitted two programmes recording Price's investigations into a ghost at Dean Manor, Rochester. Listeners heard how a ghost hunter went about his business, sprinkling wax and powdered starch on the floor to detect footprints, wiping powdered graphite on the walls to test fingerprints, human or otherwise, and setting thermometer to detect any sudden drop in temperature that might herald the clammy coldness of a ghost.

Although ghosts did not excite Price's interest as much as the possible existence of human psychic powers (hence his work on poltergeists), his knowledge of historical hauntings, based on a valuable collection of rare tracts and books, was impressive. Today his name is most associated with his investigation of the haunting of Borley Rectory, Essex.[118] The rectory had been built in the mid nineteenth century, apparently on the site of a Benedictine abbey. Several decades later, inhabitants began to report seeing the apparition of a nun and subsequently poltergeist-type activities began, such as the ringing of

bells and throwing of objects. Local legend had it – or a legend was created to explain it – that back in the thirteenth century a monk and a nun had eloped. They were caught, the monk was hanged and the nun was walled up in her convent. In 1929 the incumbent clergyman, the Rev. Guy Smith, called the *Daily Mirror* about the strange goings-on, and the news editor invited Harry Price to investigate accompanied by a *Mirror* reporter. They were treated to a good performance of smashing glass and stone throwing. The following year a new vicar, the Rev. Lionel Foyster, moved in, and if anything the manifestations became more intense and elaborate. Writing was scrawled on the walls requesting that a Mass be said. The Foysters moved out in 1935, and two years later the by now notorious rectory was rented by Price, who placed the following advertisement in *The Times*, which delineated the requisite characteristics of the ghost hunter:

> Haunted House.– Responsible persons of leisure and intelligence, intrepid, critical, and unbiased, are invited to join rota of observers in a year's night and day investigation of alleged haunted house in Home Counties. Printed instructions supplied. Scientific training or ability to operate simple instruments an advantage. House situated in lonely hamlet, so own car is essential.[119]

One of those who got involved in the investigation was the Rev. W.J. Phythian-Adams, Canon of Carlisle, who constructed a detailed historical hypothesis for the identity of the troubled ghost. He concluded that it was a seventeenth-century French nun brought to Borley Manor by Henry Waldegrave, who later strangled her. The rectory burned down in 1939, though the site continued to be a hotspot for psychical investigators, with ghostly phenomena continuing to be observed there over the following decades. Thanks to Price it has become the best-known haunted house in the country, perhaps in the world.[120]

There were other, now largely forgotten ghost hunters who were quite well known in their day through their books and newspaper articles. One such figure was Nandor Fodor (1895–1964), a Hungarian-born journalist and psychoanalyst, who, like most investigators down the centuries, was mostly drawn to poltergeist phenomena. Unlike most others, he generally eschewed publicity. He once described Price as 'intensely selfish, jealous, and intent on his own glory at all costs'.[121] Amongst his investigations was a bell-ringing and door-opening haunting at Aldborough Manor, Yorkshire, in 1936, and in the same year the more intriguing case of a noisy haunting at Ash Manor, Sussex. In the latter, a pair of psychical investigators had previously explained to the

family that the ghost of a man who committed suicide in 1819 haunted the Manor, while a well-known medium divined that it was a man who had been tortured and imprisoned nearby in the medieval period.[122] There was also the Cornish folklorist William Henry Paynter who, during the 1940s, along with Prince Birabongse Bhanubandh as his sidekick, zipped around the county in the prince's sports car investigating haunted houses and phantom sightings, giving talks on his experiences to local societies and gatherings.[123] In the 1970s and 1980s Peter Underwood laid claim to the press tag of Britain's leading 'ghost hunter', combining the flair, knowledge and entrepreneurial drive of Price with the publishing ubiquity of O'Donnell. He thankfully refrained from titling his memoirs *Confessions of* … .[124] Today there are numerous 'how-to' ghost-hunting manuals available for budding investigators, who can also benefit from having new technology like night-vision goggles and digital cameras at their disposal.[125] In England the recent success of Living TV's *Most Haunted* series, which presents sensational, telegenic live investigations, and its spin-off publications, have also no doubt boosted renewed interest in the occupation of ghost hunter. It also highlights the rise of the medium as exorcist. Rather than adjuring or praying that ghosts depart from houses, mediums act as ghost counsellors, seeking to relieve spirits of their mental burdens. Unlike the clergy, modern mediums have no need of the scriptures, only the gift of compassion and sensitivity to the needs of the spirit world.[126]

The ghost hunters, as I have defined them, were, of course, not the only active investigators during the twentieth century. The SPR and other societies, such as the Institute of Psychophysical Research, continued to act as more sober forums for investigation. In 1956, for example the SPR published a damning report on Price's involvement in the Borley Rectory haunting, suggesting that he had colluded with the creation of fraudulent phenomena.[127] In the last couple of decades, though, due to academic interest in the subject, the serious study of ghosts has moved away from the traditional techniques of site investigation and collation of witness accounts. There have been various laboratory-based attempts to recreate psychic phenomena or to monitor neuropsychological behaviour and hallucinatory experiences.[128] Psychologists have also gone back out into the field. Their aim this time is not to record or debunk ghostly manifestations though, but to monitor the response of people to reputedly haunted environments. Richard Wiseman recently led research experiments at two well-known haunted locations: Hampton Court Palace, and South Bridge Vaults in Edinburgh. The team used questionnaires to examine people's responses to visiting the haunted spots and electromagnetic equipment to measure anomalies in the magnetic fields that might affect

people's sensory perception. They concluded that those in the survey who reported characteristic phenomena at both sites – sense of presence, strange odours, drops in temperature and even apparitions – may have been influenced by localised environmental stimuli such as magnetic fields and lighting levels. Another recent, similar study of a reputedly haunted bedroom at Muncaster Castle emphasised the potential importance of magnetic variations on those who see or sense ghosts.[129]