

LEARNING MADE EASY



Ghost-Hunting

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Zak Bagans

Host, executive producer, Travel Channel's *Ghost Adventures*; Founder/Curator, *The Haunted Museum*



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Introduction

Thank you for picking up this book. I hope that it will be useful to you as a common sense guide to paranormal investigation. It wasn't written to say that I have all the answers when it comes to the paranormal. No one really does. We are all learning and discovering as we go, but I hope that you can learn something from the research that I have done over the years and make what it contains work for you.

About This Book

This book was written to provide a general reference for paranormal research and ghost-hunting. In a field that is always changing, it can be difficult to offer a specific guide. The field of paranormal research has been around for more than 170 years, and it's always changing. Many tried and true methods of investigation have been replaced by scientific equipment and new ideas, but I have tried to combine these things to help you as you search for compelling evidence in your own research.

This book has a very simple goal: Provide the reader with the essential information needed to conduct research into ghosts and the paranormal. But this goal is deceptively simple because the outcome of such research is not simple at all. In fact, it can be so complex and confusing that many people walk away from the paranormal field every day, scratching their heads and wondering if all the work and effort is really worth it. Trust me, it is!

Just remember that this is a guide that was written for *you*, the ghost-hunter. Obviously, I won't have all the

answers about ghosts until I am one myself, but I can pass along the knowledge, ideas, and theories that have been gained by my own past experiences with hauntings. My hope is that you, as the reader and the researcher, will be able to take away at least one small piece of what you find in this book for yourself and use it in your own investigations. You'll be able to see what I have done and, hopefully, learn from what I have discovered over the years. If you manage to gain some new ideas and discover some new methods from this book, then I can consider it a success.

I should also point out that the ideas in this book are my own, based on my own years of research. Paranormal investigators, no matter how experienced, do not uniformly agree on what makes a place become haunted or even about what ghosts actually are. Everyone has his or her own ideas on the subject, and mine are certainly not meant to be the final word on it. I'm not afraid to state my opinions, though, and am willing to run the risk that you may not agree with them. That's fine by me — you don't need to agree with what I have to say. I just hope that you'll form your own opinions and at least find some things here that you can put to work for yourself.

So, what can you expect in the pages ahead?

Foolish Assumptions

In this book, I make some assumptions that very well may be foolish, about you, your ghost-hunting experience, and your goals.

- » You are fascinated with ghosts, hauntings, and the unexplained and may even have some experience with paranormal investigation.

- » You have patience and a determination to learn more about the subject matter in hopes of increasing your knowledge about the best ways to investigate the unknown.
- » You are willing to approach the subject with an open mind.
- » You are willing to devote time and energy to gathering authentic evidence of the paranormal and doing everything you can to rule out natural explanations for anomalies before assuming they are paranormal.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the margin of this book are small images, known as *icons*. These icons mark important tidbits of information:



TIP

The Tip icon identifies places where I offer additional tips that will enhance your investigation, knowledge, or skills.



REMEMBER

The Remember icon bookmarks important notes about information that you'll want to remember.



WARNING

The Warning icon helps to protect you from making the common mistakes that should be avoided by all ghost-hunters.



ZAK
SAYS

This icon highlights my words of wisdom or personal experiences.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this product also comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that covers well-known ghosts and haunted places. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and search for "Ghost-Hunting For Dummies Cheat Sheet" in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

I wish you good luck on the strange journey that you are about to begin into the world of paranormal investigation. Remember that genuine and compelling evidence of the spirit world doesn't always come quickly. It often takes a long time to find the authentic cases that you are looking for, but this book helps you tell the difference between the natural and supernatural events you encounter.

Part 1

The Basics of Ghost-Hunting

IN THIS PART ...

Ghost-hunting, from the beginning of recorded time,
through the Spiritualist era, to modern-day ghost-hunters

The belief in ghosts and the spirit world

An exploration of science and the spirit world

How ghost-hunting has been shaped by popular culture

Why do you want to look for ghosts?

Chapter 1

Searching for Spirits: Why Do We Do It?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Searching for life after death
 - » Looking for ghosts
 - » Turning an interest in ghosts into paranormal research
-

I was once assured by an award-winning physicist that we have nothing to fear from ghosts because they simply do not exist. They cannot walk among us, he said, because their feet would have to apply pressure to the floor. If they were able to do this, they could not pass through walls because being able to do one without being able to do the other would violate the scientific laws of action and reaction.

In the foreword to Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits* (New York, NY: Facts on File, Inc., 2007), Troy Taylor writes:

Ghosts, quite simply, he explained, cannot be real.

Like so many other scientists throughout history, this physicist was basing his ideas about spirits on his own personal beliefs. Science demands that for something to truly be “real,” it has to be capable of being duplicated over and over again under scientific conditions. As we know, the supernatural rarely conforms to the idea of repeatable experiments. We

can measure, document, and record, but ghosts seldom perform in the way that mainstream science requires. Ghosts avoid the laboratory. If you drag them out of the shadows and expose them to the harsh glare of what science is convinced is reality, they tend to vanish.

But yet, those of you reading this book believe that ghosts are real. So do I. Like many of you, I have seen them, felt them, experienced them, and, in some cases, have had them uncomfortably attached to me in ways that I do not appreciate.

How can they be real, though, if science says they cannot exist? If millions of Americans did not believe in ghosts, this book would not exist. Neither would the hundreds of other books out there or the television shows that fascinate so many people. Nationwide polls tell us that 1 in 3 Americans believe that houses can be haunted. An even larger percentage of people believe communicating with the dead is possible. If ghosts don't exist, why do millions of people believe that they do?

This is a perplexing question to most scientists and skeptics, but not others. Those who research the paranormal know that reports of ghosts and spirits have been with us for centuries, dating back to the days of Ancient Rome. Ordinary people have been having encounters with the spirits of the dead longer than history has been recorded and, of course, are still having them today.

Such encounters serve to keep mainstream scientists and hardened skeptics lying awake at night, unable to sleep and paralyzed by fear. This is not because they are afraid of ghosts but because they are afraid that

the grip they have on society, demanding that they not believe in such things, has started to slip again.

This is not the first time that such a thing has happened. In the 19th century, scientists were shaken to the core by the rise of the Spiritualist movement, which believed that the spirits of the dead could communicate with the living. Angered by the fact that new innovations in the scientific field had just started to break the hold that superstition and religion had on society, they immediately set about to debunk everything possible about Spiritualism. And although many hoaxes were exposed, there were just enough genuine mediums among the fakes to send many of the scientists back to their universities and laboratories in fear. Others, like Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, and others, became convinced of the reality of life after death.

Today, with new technology assailing us from every side, scientists have once again assured us not to worry — ghosts, hauntings, and haunted houses are not real. In this modern era, such things cannot exist. There is nothing out there in the dark.

This is what they tell us, but we know differently, don't we? (Taylor, vi-vii)

My Approach to Ghost-Hunting

Using my own experiences with ghost research, I'm offering a system for investigating hauntings that has worked for me. I also discuss working with witnesses, dealing with ghost sightings, conducting interviews, finding haunted places, working with spirit

communication devices, using equipment and new techniques and experiments you can use during your investigations, and much more.

I also delve into the basics of ghost research, including the nature of ghosts themselves and real-life haunted houses. I should note here that the term “haunted house” can mean a lot of things from old decaying mansions to new tract homes but remember that just about any place can become haunted, including churches, theaters, libraries, office buildings, and even caves, tunnels, and graveyards. What we call “haunting” activity in such locations can be any sort of unexplained happenings, like apparitions, footsteps, noises, odors, and more. For a spot to be considered genuinely haunted, the reported phenomena must be directly related to the place itself. For example, we can refer to a family that lives in a haunted house and decides to move out. If the house is really haunted, the next family who lives there should experience the same things as the previous one.

However, there are many different kinds of hauntings. No two cases are ever exactly alike. When conducting your research, you’re bound to discover various kinds of activity and sometimes, believe it or not, it will be at the same location.

In some places, ghosts are seen. Some reports claim that they are white, mist-like forms that only resemble a person. They are sometimes transparent, and you are able to see through them. In other cases, the ghosts are reported as appearing very life-like. In fact, witnesses sometimes mistake the ghosts for living persons, at least until they vanish into the wall or disappear through a solid door.

Ghosts don’t always make an appearance. In the majority of cases, ghostly noises are heard instead. Witnesses

report everything from footsteps to voices, mumbling, whispers, knocking sounds, and more. And in other houses, furniture, knick-knacks, and solid objects fly about by themselves. At other times, doors open or close, lights and appliances behave erratically, or phantom smells come and go without logical explanation. In other words, you never know what you will find in a haunted location and hopefully, this book will help prepare you for that.

In addition to the wide variety of things that you might encounter at a haunted place, there are also a lot of things that you probably won't. There exist a great many misconceptions about ghosts and hauntings. Ghosts don't appear with sheets draped over their heads, rattling chains, and ghosts are usually not out to kill anyone or avenge their deaths. The instances of harmful ghosts are so rare that the few cases that have been documented have caused a huge sensation. That's not to say that people don't get hurt during hauntings or encounter negative or demonic entities. We deal with that in the book, as well.

There are also many misconceptions about haunted houses. For example, many believe that only old, ramshackle buildings can become haunted. This is not true, as many relatively new homes have been known to attract ghosts. Theories about ghosts, hauntings, and more will be discussed throughout the book.

Even so, there seem to be few clear-cut answers when it comes to ghosts. For decades, ghost researchers have wondered what force or intelligence lies behind a haunting.

One view is that a location becomes haunted when some tragedy, like a death or a murder, takes place there. This is apparently true in some cases, but not in all. But are

ghosts really the spirits of the dead, come back to haunt us? Are they somehow attached to the places where they lived and died? Or could ghosts be “memory pictures” of the past or “energy discharges” that replay over and over again? Could some ghosts be only the memory of something that is so real that sometimes we can see it? Could some ghosts be only in our minds? For example, perhaps a friend died, and soon after, we are walking down the street, look into a window and, just for a moment, see our friend’s face looking back. The next day, perhaps we see him getting on a bus or driving a car in the opposite direction on a street. Is he really there? Is he a ghost? Or is this just a memory that is so vivid to us that we have made it real in our minds?

Ghosts can be any of these things and perhaps all of them. And I explore all these ideas in this book.

The Search for Life after Death

If you ask 100 different paranormal investigators why they hunt for ghosts, you are likely to get 100 different variations of the same answer. Many started simply, collecting strange tales and ghost stories, and then decided to see if there was anything behind the stories other than folklore and urban legends. Others started because they wanted to look beyond the horizon and beyond what is generally accepted as “reality.” Many say that they want to help people. They want to ease the fears of people who are experiencing a haunting and either help them understand that nothing in their home will hurt them or assist them in getting rid of the spirit that is causing the problem in the first place.

Other researchers may say that they are seeking answers for scientific reasons, to prove that the theory about energy is correct — that it does not die but merely changes form. Some confess that they search for spirits in spooky places for the thrill of it. They like to be scared.

No matter the reason for their fascination with the spirit world, it really boils down to a search for the same thing — proof of life after death. Polls show that the vast majority of people believe in an afterlife. Three out of four Americans believe in the existence of heaven or hell. Paranormal researchers are trying to find the evidence that affirms the belief that so many of us already have. We are seeking the elusive answer as to whether our spirits have somewhere to go when our bodies cease to function. Pure faith is not necessarily enough for the researcher. We want to know that what we believe in is real and by capturing evidence of it, we can do so.

Although ghosts are more widely accepted than they were even a few years ago, paranormal researchers still have a long way to go to validate the things they believe to be genuine. To do that, we use equipment, investigative techniques, and advanced technology to hunt for evidence of ghosts. This validation is essential to the cause, for what good are beliefs if no evidence exists to back them up? If we choose not to seek that validation, we can be happy and contented in our belief that ghosts are real but in the end, we have achieved nothing.

Chasing Ghosts

As the reader often hears throughout this book, the best kind of tool available to you as a paranormal investigator is yourself. It is your research, your knowledge, and how

you put them to use that guarantees your success as researcher. This book has the simple goal of providing the reader with the essential information needed to collect evidence of ghosts and the existence of the paranormal. This goal is not as simple as it sounds, though. Paranormal research can be challenging, complex, unnerving, and confusing. I can assure you that it is worth it, but like anything else you may do, it is only as rewarding as the effort that you put into it. Hopefully, this book can show you how to make that effort worthwhile and show you that paranormal investigation is not only enlightening but thrilling, too.

I hope that the information that you find here encourages you to pick up this book again and again and I hope that the ideas, theories, and accounts within spark your interest and inspire you to develop your own theories about ghosts and paranormal research. I have passed along my own knowledge, ideas, and experiences so that you can take what I have learned and adapt that to further your own search for knowledge.

Always remember that it is okay to say, "I don't know." Paranormal researchers do not uniformly agree on what makes a place become haunted, how spirits behave, or even about what ghosts actually are. There seem to be very few clear-cut answers but that should never stop us from searching for them. Ghosts may be the spirits of the dead, returned to haunt us, attached to the place where they lived and died. They may be residual memories, energy that repeats itself over and over again. Ghosts may be any of these things and perhaps all of them.

And that brings us back around to mainstream science.

We are in a field with no absolute answers and this makes it difficult to prove that ghosts exist but, I believe, not impossible. By definition, a ghost is a disembodied

personality, and mainstream science states that no physical evidence of the human personality even exists. Science will not admit that such a thing is present inside of the body while it is still functioning, let alone outside of the body when we are dead.

But, of course, the human personality is real. It exists. It cannot be determined by scientific experiments, much like ghosts cannot. But we know it to be the truth. Hundreds of years ago, mainstream science believed that the earth was flat. A Greek named Pythagoras was the first to introduce the idea that the world was round, but it would not be for another 300 years before another Greek, Eratosthenes, would create a mathematical theory to back up the idea. Even then, it was dismissed by most as ridiculous. It would not be until Magellan finally sailed around the world in 1522 that proof of the world being round was finally accepted. His “experiment” finally proved that the earth really was round.

Someday, I believe that our own “experiments” will finally start to convince the skeptics that the paranormal is real. It will no longer be a matter of belief or faith but hard evidence that the dead do live on and that they can interact with the living.

Is All the Work Really Worth It?

At this point, you may have realized how much work it takes to be a reputable researcher, and you may be wondering whether it is worth it. I can assure you that it is. Tens of thousands of people around the country are involved in ongoing paranormal research, and I am fairly certain they all would agree with me.

We all may have different reasons for pursuing the paranormal, but it all boils down to doing the work. There are many things that a good paranormal investigator must be armed with. He or she needs equipment, cameras, and tools of the trade. He or she must know what to look for, how to operate the equipment, know what questions to ask, know how to properly investigate, know how to follow up, and more.

The common factor with all these things, though, is the investigator. As mentioned, he or she becomes the most important tool in any investigation. This person must use his or her mind, judgment, and powers of observation in every case. No equipment, recorders, or books are going to help in an investigation if the investigator is unwilling to pursue the paranormal to the best of his or her ability.

An investigator must always remember that the goal of this pursuit has many layers. Not only are we seeking evidence of spirits, but we are also there to help the client who called us in to investigate in the first place. It may be a distressed person or a frightened family and one of the investigator's main responsibilities is to assist them. At that time and place, you will seem like the best friend they have.

If you are just starting out, don't be surprised if it takes some time to track down a genuine case and some hard evidence. You will get involved in a lot of investigations and meet some very scared people who believe their house is haunted. You will likely find a lot of creaking floorboards, banging pipes, faulty outlets, and drafty windows before you ever find what you believe is a ghost.

Do not give up, though! Being a paranormal investigator can be a long, strange, frustrating trip but when you do

find that first genuine case, you will be happy you decided to stick with it.