

The Life Expectancy of Ghosts

In the history of paranormal research, much has been said about the longevity of ghosts. How long do they haunt seems as big a question as why. To find the answer we turn to the various histories of ghosts and in some cases, return to the “scene” to see if they are still active, but a note of warning seems in order. The ASUP is an American enterprise, thus the longevity of active spirits is limited by the total inhabitation of the area we study. With the possible exception of the Chaco Canyon site, none of the haunting we have studied is more than 350 years old, thus European and Asian case histories might be at odds with the presumptions made here.

Looking at the case book as a whole, we have had a plethora of “old ghosts” both residual and interactive. Having been based in New York, we have a heavy load of New England spirits as well as other eastern seaboard grounded ghosts. Likewise, when we were in the Dominican Republic there was a heavy concentration. It is easy to say that ghosts will remain at a site for a very long time, possibly to infinity, but that is a gross overstatement. While Sally and Maj. Andre still haunt Oyster Bay; and the Morris-Jumel Mansion in NYC still has its picky female spirit in residence to scold little children, that is no proof of overall longevity.

First, we have to look at non-reactive or residual, in other words they are seen much like a film clip, replaying over and over without interacting with anyone witnessing them. We will grant that the report of Roman troops marching in file along the English countryside would suggest the life of such phenomenon to be at least a thousand years; however, we have to also look at the conditions in which they are seen. A ghostly castle image playing out among the stone ruins actually gives us a very good hint, more scientific than paranormal. What is the makeup of those stone walls? Can certain types of stone act as a recording agent? Some say that in fact it does, thus the longevity of the haunt suggests the quality of the stone around it. That might be a reach, but it is worthy of further study, comparing them to cases of residual activity where there are no stone structures to be seen. This points out one item for future consideration: the geography of a site, vs. its geology. A lush green field could well be covering a quartz outcropping a few feet below, and serious investigators need to know what is there. It would be worthwhile to graph just how many residual sightings are found near such suspect geology.

Beyond the obvious, we have as many sites where interactive phenomenon is residing side by side with residual. This brings up a very old discussion harkening back to the days of D. Scott Rogo, when we would debate what was then euphemistically called the “Our Town Effect.” Without delving into the depths of those discussions, I can say that the effect refers to a scene from the Thornton Wilder play, specifically in the graveyard. Here two spirits, one recently passed and another who had preceded him discuss the nature of their beings. Nearby is a man, sitting on his headstone, saying nothing, responding to nothing. The elder spirit, who is teaching the late arrival the ropes, explains that as time goes forward, the memory and interactivity of spirits fades, until they simply are no more. Wilder was on to something, I believe.

Looking at the “conversations” with a recently passed fellow research through a trusted medium, William James found that the memory of his subject seemed to slip day by day. His fellow research had much to say about their work, but could not remember the names of casual friends at the club where he resided. Slowly but surely the spirits dementia seemed to progress, until he was no longer able to communicate as he once did. We saw similar affects in our studies; only recently a familiar spirit noted that communication through “The Box” was becoming exceedingly difficult. Are these spirits suffering from the “Our Town Effect?”

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If they are, then why do we have such active spirits in other locations? The spirit at the Morris-Jumel Mansion is as boisterous as ever when scolding noisy school children in her courtyard and her ghost is reported for over a 200 year history. The answer might just be a triggering mechanism. The Morris Jumel ghost is seen as non-reactive in the house, but is totally interactive when yelling from her second story window. There are hundreds of cases where we find reports of residual spirits that for one reason or another, suddenly become animated and interactive. There is another study waiting to be undertaken.

But the largest block of ghostly sightings seem to have a “half life” in any cases. “Black Friars Bobby,” The ghost of a dog who was seen after his death for years in his master’s favorite pub or seen perched and animated on the old man’s gravesite, lasted about 50 years before fading. Interest in the story has not faded, so we can assume it has little to do with earthly desires, but he has not been reported for years. But why is HE gone while the spirit 200 years past is still with us? What makes one spirit carry on for what seems to be forever, while another fades with time?

Two issues come to mind; the first is intent and the second is passion. By intent I mean the spirits intention, for instance the ghost of Morris Jumel is proud to show off her home, but protective of the gardens, yelling at children not to run in the flower beds or make such a racket, it simply is not allowed in polite 19th Century society. She flashes in and out of various rooms as tours are given, as if to say, “Isn’t my home grand!” but doesn’t understand the nature of modern children and has been reported scolding them for five minutes, a long time for a ghost!

In the case of Maj. Andre near the old Sleepy Hollow Burying Grounds, he was in the act of carrying out orders (By the way, although Washington ordered him executed for spying, Andre was in full Ranger’s Uniform when seized, and was therefore really a combatant, not a spy) Andre is simply playing out his role, attempting to find his own lines and deliver the demands of Gen. Benedict Arnold, commander of West Point for that facilities surrender to the British.

This is very much removed from the spirit of Andre in Oyster Bay, where he was billeted in the home of the fair Miss Sally Townsend, with whom he was deeply in love. The fact that the Townsend family chose to call their American homestead Raynham Hall, after their ancestral home in England (Now home of the infamous Grey Lady) is not lost on us. The idea that two properties on either side of the Atlantic, sharing the same name, have ghosts is interesting to say the least.

At Raynham Hall, the good Major is seen on horseback, dressed in his green uniform of the Ranger’s Cavalry. Eyewitnesses’ describe him perfectly and his uniform, although they are all confused why he is not wearing Red. American’s expect Red Coats associated with British Troops, but Maj. Andre’s unit wore hunter green, were mounted cavalry and never wore the traditional Red Coats. Even though the witnesses expected to see a red coat, they described a green uniform, often mistaking it for a Continental uniform, which was predominantly blue when American forces could afford them. Nevertheless, it is Andre they are describing, his face and body style they see. It is reasonable that he is in Oyster Bay to return to Sally, who died an old maid long after the war. This is a haunting of passion.

All of these hauntings are young by European standards -- only a few hundred years; but how long will they continue?

I think the answer to that is based on earthbound interest by those who are alive. The family

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who mourns the loss, how long the reputation and folk lore about the subject continues, and the makeup of the place that is haunted all suggest that longevity requires energy from people who frequent the place. It would seem that a ghost not visited, who is devoid of human energy and recognition has a short existence here, but those who are celebrated, remembered and interacted with can go on much longer.

Of course there is a fly in the ointment with this belief; we have many case histories of old, abandoned places, like the ghost town I visited in the Colorado Rockies, where human interaction was minimal, but it seems dozens of ghosts still live there among the ruins of a once prosperous mining town. As one colleague noted at the time of our overnight visit, "They are having too good a time to notice they are dead!" The remnants of the boom town, now accessible only with a 4-wheel drive over an almost impassable one lane cliff-hanger, had the remains of a saloon and several brothels. The night was filled with the sounds of a party, where only a small band of investigators now stood. The only explanation, once again, was "place;" the ghost town sat on top of the Rockies and like the famous Stanley Hotel was built on a rock ledge, most probably quartz.

So, let's look at the tech side of the question. The EMF meter is interesting around ghosts. The K-2, many believe is great for a dialogue with a ghost. But here is the question, when the EMF meter is picking up energy passing from a host to the ghostly presence, is the K-2 looking at the ghost's reaction or the host's passage of energy? The answer is probably the same whichever way the stream is moving, I suppose, but technically there is a difference. If it is the later, then the host is acting as the medium and we are drawing the answer from the medium, not from the spirit directly.

EMF is an interesting topic to begin with, what are you measuring??? While higher than normal EMF is prevalent when researchers find a "cold spot," is there always a cold spot present when there is a flux in EMF? Extremely Low Frequency radiation or ELF is the primary cause for an EMF meter to trigger responses but should not cause a cold spot; if anything, there should be a rise in temperature. The K-2 version of the EMF meter is in fact the invention of a company that was aiming at finding leaky microwave ovens for home use, in other words ELF leaks. But this is not the only kind of EMF you can detect with our meters, [radio waves](#), [infrared](#), [visible light](#), [ultraviolet](#), [X-rays](#) and [gamma rays](#) all emit what we would have to categorize as EMF and all have varying effects on humans; an ungrounded, unprotected transformer emits great quantities of EMF and can cause the feeling of paranoia, being watched or mild hallucinations if a person is subjected to them at close range, but not a cold spot.

While ELF leaks are the prevalent problem detected by a K-2 for instance, one could argue that disruptions in the infrared, ultraviolet, X-ray and gamma ray spectrum could be detected by our meters as well, thus the interest in broad spectrum photography, IR and UV, where there is practical applications that have yielded what we call "spirit photography." If you have a very high EMF reading on a good metering system at the moment you have captured an ORB (not dust) that reading is probably related to the photographed manifestation.

But is it rational to say that to take a spirit photo you must have an EMF reading, i.e. should you only take photos in a haunted location when the EMF is high? The answer to that one is simple. While EMF is sometimes found in the broad spectrum we call IR and UV, a high reading could also have a natural cause or a physical reaction due to energy emitted by faulty electronics, for instance. The photographic spectrum is captured at sometimes long distances,

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and it would be impossible to state categorically that there was a high EMF at the site of the photo, although it is probably true that if you jabbed an EMF detector into a photographic anomaly at that moment, it would probably have a higher than normal EMF.

So, what have we learned? First, we learned that to have a visible spirit, you have to have energy, either self generated or “borrowed” from a host nearby. That energy is measurable using simple EMF meters, but whether we are reading actual energy from the source or the transference from a host is too general a question at the moment. We do know however that the EMF meter can be used to receive simple “yes or no” answers from the spirit, either directly or through the host acting as a medium.

We have also learned that ghosts can exist for a long time, several thousands of years in a few cases, although those cases are non-reactionary, or residual spirits that can move but do not responds to human interaction.

We also learned that interacting spirits have questionable “shelf life” but that is based on the area being investigated as it related to human habitation; in the United States that is a relatively short period, little more than a few hundred years and pales in comparison to some European and Asian sights. Therefore, the jury is still out on the projected longevity of any particular ghost, although we know for certain, they require an outside energy source to continue to exist.

This brings us to a curious question. When studying the “Spook Light” phenomenon 40 years ago, it was determined that the pale light that seemed to hang like a lantern from an invisible man’s arm was in fact a manifestation caused by a very select group of events, physical and atmospheric. The light could be predicted. It would appear over parallel railroad tracks that were laid over quartz stone beds, and only appeared under specific atmospheric conditions.

It was because of this case that we began to report the weather at a scene, as well as EMF and physical locale and after two years, we were able to predict where, when and how the lights would appear. They could be photographed, did not react to magnetic fields per se and in one case, was able to pass through a researcher’s body while it was travelling down the tracks. It was not paranormal.

While I am not willing to say that ghosts are not paranormal as well, I am questioning what physical properties must be present for a manifestation. In one recent case, we were able to photograph, record on audio and interact with three ghosts and were also able to confirm that they once lived on the property in question, how and when they died and why they were still here, at least philosophically, but the question still remains, why are they able to do what they do, where they do it, while other places on Earth would seem ripe for such phenomenon.

The ASUP basic entrance exam asks if it is likely that a place of great tragedy involving a mass of people is more likely than in a home where a single individual has died alone. Statistically, the correct answer is “No” There is no reason to believe that Hiroshima or Ground Zero at the World Trade Center is any more haunted than the house in which I live. To that end, this topic needs a good deal more research.

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