

The Ramhurst Revenants

The Survival Files — Case 25 — ESS = 256

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In 1866, Alfred Russell Wallace,¹ described this case as one in which the evidence for the appearance of spirits was “as good and definite as it is possible for any evidence of any fact to be.” One hundred and thirty-three years later, author Susy Smith claimed it was her favorite ghost story.² The text here is taken from the original by Robert Dale Owen. A former member of the Indiana Constitutional Convention, a U.S. Congressman (drafter of the bill to establish the Smithsonian Institution) and an American Minister at Naples, Owen was the author of many works, including *The Policy of Emancipation*. He was an outspoken skeptic of paranormal events until he witnessed a few astounding phenomena for himself. He then set himself the task of collecting the best evidence for Survival available at the time.

Owen writes:

“In October, 1857, and for several months afterwards, Mrs. Reynolds,³ the wife of a field officer of high rank in the British army, was residing in Ramhurst Manor House, near Leigh, in Kent, England. From the time of her first occupying this ancient residence, every inmate of the house had been more or less disturbed at night — not usually during the day — by knockings and sounds as of footsteps, but more especially by voices, which could not be accounted for. These last were usually heard in some unoccupied adjoining room; sometimes as if talking in a loud tone, sometimes as if reading aloud, occasionally as if screaming. The servants were much alarmed. They never saw anything; but the cook told Mrs. Reynolds that on one occasion, in broad daylight, hearing the rustle of a silk dress close behind her, and which seemed to touch her, she turned suddenly round, supposing it to be her mistress, but, to her great surprise and terror, could see nobody. Mrs. Reynolds's brother, a bold, light-hearted young officer, fond of field-sports, and without the slightest faith in the reality of visitations from another world, was much disturbed and annoyed by these voices, which he declared must be those of his sister and of a lady friend of hers, sitting up together to chat all night. On two occasions, when a voice which he thought to resemble his sister's rose to a scream, as if imploring aid, he rushed from his room, at two or three o'clock in the morning, gun in hand, into his sister's bedroom, there to find her quietly asleep.

“On the second Saturday in the above month of October, Mrs Reynolds drove over to the railway-station at Tunbridge, to meet her friend Miss Stevens, whom she had invited to spend some weeks with her. This young lady had been in the habit of seeing apparitions, at times, from her early childhood.

¹ *The Scientific Aspect of the Supernatural*, 1866, p. 21.

² Smith, Susy, *Life Is Forever*, p.53.

³ All names here are pseudonyms. Owen was personally acquainted with both “Reynolds” and “Stevens.”

“When, on their return, at about four o’clock in the afternoon, they drove up to the entrance of the manor-house, Miss Stevens perceived on the threshold two figures, apparently an elderly couple, habited in the costume of a former age. They appeared as if standing on the ground. She did not hear any voice; and, not wishing to render her friend uneasy, she made at that time no remark to her in connection with this apparition.

“She saw the appearance of the same figures, in the same dress, several times within the next ten days, sometimes in one of the rooms of the house, sometimes in one of the passages C always by daylight. They appeared to her surrounded by an atmosphere nearly of the color usually called neutral tint. On the third occasion they spoke to her, and stated that they had been husband and wife, that in former days they had possessed and occupied that manor-house, and that their name was *Children*. They appeared sad and downcast; and, when Miss Stevens inquired the cause of their melancholy, they replied that they had idolized this property of theirs; that their pride and pleasure had centered in its possession; that its improvement had engrossed their thoughts; and that it troubled them to know that it had passed away from their family and to see it now in the hands of careless strangers.

“I asked Miss Stevens *how* they spoke. She replied that the voice was audible to her as that of a human being’s; and that she believed it was heard also by others in an adjoining room. This she inferred from the fact that she was afterward asked with whom she had been conversing.*
*[Footnote in Owen’s text: * Yet this is not conclusive. It might have been Miss Steven’s voice only that was heard, not any reply — though heard by her — made by the apparitions. Visible to her, they were invisible to others. Audible to her, they may to others have been inaudible also. Yet it is certain that the voices at night were heard equally by all.]*

“After a week or two, Mrs. Reynolds, beginning to suspect that something unusual, connected with the constant disturbances in the house, had occurred to her friend, questioned her closely on the subject; and then Miss Stevens related to her what she had seen and heard, describing the appearances and relating the conversation of the figures calling themselves Mr. and Mrs. Children.

“Up to that time, Mrs. Reynolds, though her rest had been frequently broken by the noises in the house, and though she too has the occasional perception of apparitions, had seen nothing; nor did any thing appear to her for a month afterward. One day, however, about the end of that time, when she had ceased to expect any apparition to herself, she was hurriedly dressing for a late dinner, her brother, who had just returned from a day’s shooting, having called to her in impatient tones that dinner was served and that he was quite famished. At the moment of completing her toilet, and as she hastily turned to leave her bed-chamber, not dreaming of any thing spiritual, there in the doorway stood the same female figure Miss Stevens had described — identical in appearance and costume, even to the old point-lace on her brocaded silk dress — while beside her, on the left, but less distinctly visible, was the figure of her husband. They uttered no sound; but above the figure of the lady, as if written in phosphoric light in the dusk atmosphere that surrounded her, were the words ‘*Dame Children,*’ together with some other words, intimating that, having never aspired beyond the joys and sorrows of this world, she had remained ‘*earth-bound.*’ These last, however, Mrs. Reynolds scarcely paused to decipher; for a renewed appeal from her brother, as to whether they were to have any dinner that day, urged her forward. The figure, filling up the doorway, remained stationary. There was no time for hesitation: she closed her eyes, rushed through the apparition and into the dining room, throwing up her hands and exclaiming to Miss Stevens, ‘*Oh, my dear, I’ve walked through Mrs. Children!*’

“This was the only time during her residence in the old manor-house that Mrs. Reynolds witnessed the apparition of these figures.

“And it is to be remarked that her bed-chamber, at the time, was lighted, not only by candles, but by a cheerful fire, and that there was a lighted lamp in the corridor which communicated thence to the dining-room.

“This repetition of the word ‘Children’ caused the ladies to make inquiries among the servants and in the neighborhood whether any family bearing that name had ever occupied the manor-house. Among those whom they thought likely to know something about it was a Mrs. Sophy Osman, a nurse in the family, who had spent her life in that vicinity. But all inquiries were fruitless; every one to whom they put the question, the nurse included, declaring that they had never heard of such a name. So they gave up all hopes of being able to unravel the mystery.

“It so happened, however, that, about four months afterward, this nurse, going home for a holiday to her family at Riverhead, about a mile from Seven Oaks, and recollecting that one of her sisters-in-law, who lived near her, an old woman of seventy, had fifty years before been housemaid in a family then residing at Ramhurst, inquired of her if she had ever heard any thing of a family named Children. The sister-in-law replied that no such family occupied the manor-house when she was there; but she recollected to have then seen an old man who told her that in his boyhood he had assisted to keep the hounds of the Children family, who were then residing at Ramhurst. This information the nurse communicated to Mrs. Reynolds on her return; and thus it was that that lady was first informed that a family named Children really had once occupied the manor-house.

“All these particulars I received in December, 1858, directly from the ladies themselves, both being together at the time.

“Even up to this point the case, as it presented itself, was certainly a very remarkable one. But I resolved, if possible, to obtain further confirmation in the matter.

“I inquired of Miss Stevens whether the apparitions had communicated to her any additional particulars connected with the family. She replied that she recollected one which she had then received from them, namely, the husband's name was *Richard*. At a subsequent period likewise, she had obtained the date of Richard Children's death, which, as communicated to her, was 1753. She remembered also that on one occasion a third spirit appeared with them, which they stated was their son; but she did not get his name. To my further inquiries as to the costumes in which the (alleged) spirits appeared, Miss Stevens replied ‘that they were of the period of Queen Anne or one of the early Georges, she could not be sure which, as the fashions in both were similar.’ These were her exact words. Neither she nor Mrs. Reynolds, however, had obtained any information tending either to verify or to refute these particulars.

“Having an invitation from some friends residing near Seven Oaks, in Kent, to spend with them the Christmas week of 1858, I had a good opportunity of prosecuting my inquiries in the way of verification.”

[At this point in his testimony, Owens relates how he visited the nurse, Sophie Osman, and she confirmed Reynold's story of strange voices, footsteps, and the incident with the cook hearing a silk dress rustle behind her. A nice corroboration, but we need to trim this tale somewhere.]

“But as all this afforded no clew either to the Christian name, or the date of occupation, or the year of Mr. Children's death, I visited, in search of these, the church and graveyard at Leigh, the nearest to the Ramhurst property, and the old church at Tunbridge; making inquiries in both places on the subject. But to no purpose. All I could learn was, that a certain George Children left, in the year 1718, a weekly gift of bread to the poor, and that a descendant of the family, also named

George, dying some forty years ago, and not residing at Ramhurst, had a marble tablet, in the Tunbridge church, erected to his memory.

“Sextons and tombstones having failed me, a friend suggested that I might possibly obtain the information I sought by visiting a neighboring clergyman. I did so, and with the most fortunate result. Simply stating to him that I had taken the liberty to call in search of some particulars touching the early history of a Kentish family of the name of Children, he replied that, singularly enough, he was in possession of a document, coming to him through a private source, and containing, he thought likely, the very details of which I was in search. He kindly intrusted it to me; and I found in it, among numerous particulars regarding another member of the family, not many years since deceased, certain extracts from the ‘Hasted Papers,’ preserved in the British Museum; these being contained in a letter addressed by one of the members of the Children family to Mr. Hasted. Of this document, which may be consulted in the Museum library, I here transcribe a portion, as follows:

‘The family of Children were settled for a great many generations at a house called, from their own name, Cbildrens, situated at a place called Nether Street, otherwise Lower Street, Hildenborough, in the parish of Tunbridge. George Children of Lower Street, who was High-Sheriff of Kent in 1698, died without issue in 1718, and by will devised the bulk of his estate to Richard Children, eldest son of his late uncle, William Children of Hedcorn, and his heirs. This Richard Children, *who settled himself at Ramhurst,*⁴ in the parish of Leigh, married Anne, daughter of John Saxby, in the parish of Leeds, by whom he had issue four sons and two daughters,’ &c.

“Thus I ascertained that the first of the Children family who occupied Ramhurst as a residence was named Richard, and that he settled there in the early part of the reign of George I. The year of his death; however, was not given.

“This last particular I did not ascertain till several months afterward; when a friend versed in antiquarian lore, to whom I mentioned my desire to obtain it, suggested that the same Hasted, an extract from whose papers I have given, had published, in 1778, a history of Kent, and that, in that work, I might possibly obtain the information I sought. In effect, after considerable search, I there found the following paragraph:

"In the eastern part of the Parish of Lyghe (now Leigh), near the river Medway, stands an ancient mansion called Ramhurst, once reputed a Manor and held of the honor of Gloucester." ... "It continued in the Culpepper family for several generations." ... "It passed by sale into that of Saxby, and Mr. William Saxby conveyed it, by sale, to Children. Richard Children, Esq., *resided here, and died possessed of it* in 1753, aged eighty-three years. He was succeeded in it by his eldest son, John Children, of Tunbridge, Esq., whose son, George Children, of Tunbridge, Esq., is the present possessor."* [*Footnote in Owen's text: *That is, in 1778, when the work was published. See, for the above quotation, Hasted's History of Kent, vol i, pp. 422 and 423.*]

⁴ Emphasis is Owen's (I assume).

“Thus I verified the last remaining particular, the date of Richard Children's death. It appears from the above, also, that Richard Children was the only representative of the family who lived and died at Ramhurst; his son John being designated not as of Ramhurst, but as of Tunbridge. From the private memoir above referred to I had previously ascertained that the family seat after Richard's time was Ferox Hall, near Tunbridge.

“It remains to be added that in 1816, in consequence of events reflecting no discredit on the family, they lost all their property, and were compelled to sell Ramhurst, which has since been occupied, though a somewhat spacious mansion, not as a family residence, but as a farmhouse. I visited it; and the occupant assured me that nothing worse than rats or mice disturbs it now.

“I am not sure that I have found on record, among what are usually termed ghost-stories, any narrative better authenticated than the foregoing. It involves, indeed, no startling or romantic particulars, no warning of death, no disclosure of murder, no circumstances of terror or danger; but it is all the more reliable on that account; since those passions which are wont to excite and mislead the imaginations of men were not called into play.

“It was communicated to me, about fourteen months only after the events occurred, by both the chief witnesses, and incidentally confirmed, shortly afterward, by a third.

“The social position and personal character of the two ladies to whom the figures appeared preclude, at the outset, all idea whatever of willful misstatement or deception. The sights and sounds to which they testify *did* present themselves to their senses. Whether their senses played them false is another question.”

At this point, Mr. Owen begins his analysis of the case. He first points out that Miss Stevens first saw the figures, “not in the obscurity of night, not between sleeping and waking, not in some old chamber reputed to be haunted, but in the open air, and as she was descending from a carriage, in broad daylight.” He mentions the numerous encounters, both visual and auditory, and the multiple witnesses. His major point, of course, is the precise information (names and dates) communicated by the spirits, information that was confirmed only later by his own research in obscure places.

For Further Information See:

Footfalls On The Boundary Of Another World. by Robert Dale Owen, first published in 1859 by J.B. Lippincott & Co., reprinted by Kessinger Publishing, pages 414-427.

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