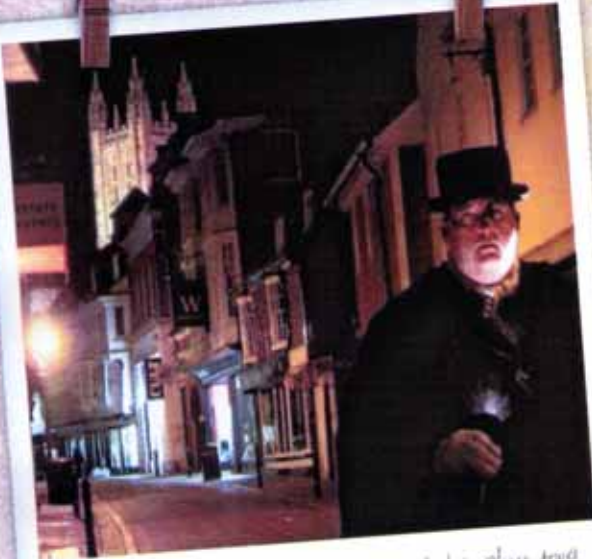


Uncanny tales

Come, sit down
with me and
listen Denise Smith
has tales to
make you shiver

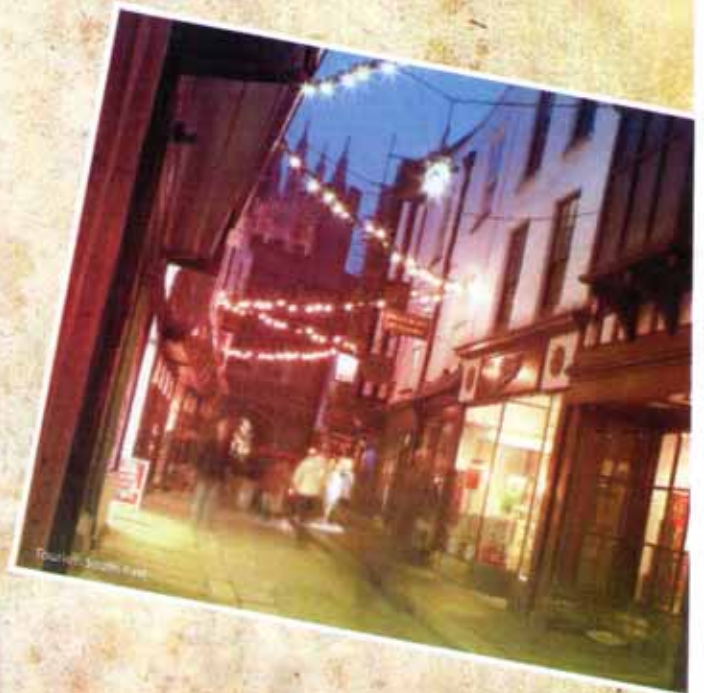


John Hippisley leading one of his ghost tours

This is just one small episode from an immensely rich store of macabre events and creepy apparitions in Canterbury", says John Hippisley, a mine of information when it comes to spooks. He runs the Canterbury Ghost Tour, which he leads through the darkened streets of the City. Suitably dressed in top hat and black cape, he provides a commentary that combines his own ghost hunting experiences with a dose of topical humour.

One of John's stories is about a woman called Abigail, whose spirit, he says, remains upstairs in a building in Hawks Road. Apparently she committed suicide after years of abuse at the hands of her husband. However he got his come-uppance. Police drew the wrong conclusions and her husband was tried and hanged for Abigail's murder.

Another is about an estate agent in St Margaret's Street. John tells of a girl dressed in grey clothing that on a number of occasions was seen entering through the front door, walking up the stairs and then disappearing. He says that later, the skeleton of a woman was found under floorboards, her bones wrapped in a piece of grey cloth.



Uncanny tales



Men are working late renovating a building following a fire. The temperature in the room they are in suddenly drops. The hairs on their arms stand up. Unusual sounds start coming from the attic, and voices can be heard from children playing on the stairs. Whispering and singing start to waft down from the panelled room on the top floor. However, the workmen are alone...

This sounds like the first scene of a TV ghost drama – but this is no fiction; this was actually reported in 2000 by men working in what was to become Tiny Tim's Tearoom in St Margaret's Street, Canterbury. Prior to their spine-chilling experience, the mummified bodies of three very young children had been found in the attic, their arms placed across their chests, and each with a bible inscribed with the date 1503. In addition, when panelling was removed from the top-floor room, children's relics were found. The teahouse's baker claims he still hears their voices when he opens up first thing in the morning.



Moving out of Canterbury, there have been many spooky events reported along the coast. The remaining half of the Roman fort at Reculver that hasn't fallen into the sea, gave up a gruesome secret back in the 60s. An archaeological dig discovered the bodies of 11 infant skeletons positioned within the foundations – in those times small babies were not treasured like they are today. Late at night the pitiful cries of babies are now said to be heard.



Every theatre, they say, has its ghost, and the old Marlowe Theatre was no different. From 1967 onwards, a figure was occasionally spotted on the right-hand side of the stage. Time will tell whether the ghost has 'survived' the demolition and rebuild.

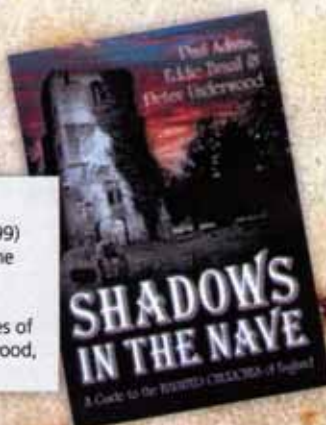
Most of the ghosts reported do seem to be quite harmless. It is said that a miserable looking figure, frequently seen in a property in Burgate, has now noticeably cheered up since a skeleton was found in the area.

If you're lucky you could catch a glimpse of a one-time Mayor of Canterbury cheerfully riding his bike around the streets of his beloved City. Or if you're in The Old Weaver's House, currently a restaurant, you could make out a lady in grey walking up the stairs. An employee of a shop along The Parade claims a figure in black walks through the shop walls.

It appears that apparitions are not restricted to people. It is alleged that an escaped leopard that lived in countryside around Canterbury for eight months before being shot, can still be seen roaming the fields.

Books

- Haunted Canterbury by John Hippisley, 2009, (RRP £9.99)
- Ghost Stories from Faversham, 1995 – available from the Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre, Faversham
- Paranormal Kent by Neil Arnold, 2010, (RRP £9.99)
- Shadows in the Nave: A Guide to the Haunted Churches of England by Paul Adams, Eddie Brazil and Peter Underwood, 2011 (RRP £15.99)





Along the coast at Herne Bay, weird have were happened at the May Lodge Club. Some staff reported smashed light bulbs and rolling beer barrels. Barmaid Gemma Marshall said: "I just ran out of the room and locked the door. The barrel was actually full so there was no way it just fell over by itself."

Most frightening was the appearance of ghostly-white woman. Everyone was at a loss to explain what was happening, but Club Chairman Dick Eldridge thought the woman might be May, the first owner of the building who lived and died upstairs sometime in the 19th century.

A 1990s report in the Sunday Telegraph claimed that Faversham was the most haunted town in Britain. From footsteps in empty apartments to terrifying poltergeists, Faversham apparently has an abundance of stories.

One such is that of The Shipwright's Arms at Hollowshore, near Faversham, where there are reports of sightings of an old sailor accompanied by the smell of rum and tobacco. It is said that one Christmas Eve sometime during the 19th century, the sole survivor of a ship wreck managed to crawl to the pub. It was well after closing time so the landlord ignored the tapping at the door. In the morning he found the sailor's body propped up outside.

As can be seen, the Canterbury locale certainly has a murky history, with murder and misadventure aplenty. Whether you believe in ghosts or not, they certainly make for interesting reading. With Halloween coming up, perhaps you could spice up the night with your own round of creepy story-telling. After all, that's how we got Frankenstein!

Canterbury Cathedral

If you want to combine history and architecture with your spooks then Canterbury Cathedral is a must. It was established in 597AD by St Augustine who was sent to England by Pope Gregory the Great. He was effectively, the first Archbishop of Canterbury.

Some of this original building still lies beneath the floor. Following a fire it was completely rebuilt by the Normans, but despite 900 years of additions, some of the 12th century Quire with its windows and stained glass still remain. The Cathedral doesn't stand still; it now houses a new sculpture, 'Transport', created by artist Antony Gormley, and suspended above the site of Archbishop Thomas Becket's first resting place in the Eastern Crypt.

A number of ghosts are supposed to reside in the building. However Becket, who came to an infamously sticky end in 1170, apparently isn't one of them, although there is a suggestion that the hooded figure that resides in the Chapel of Our Lady in the Crypt may be that of Becket.

A different murdered Archbishop is Simon Sudbury. He was killed in 1381 by Wat Tyler, leader of the Peasants' revolt. Some say he wanders through the Cathedral; others claim he haunts a bedroom in Sudbury Tower. Strangely, although he was beheaded and his parts buried in separate places, people say his ghost appears whole.

Another gruesome story is that of Nell Cook. She was servant to one of the Cathedral's canons. She was so angry at finding out her employer was having an affair she decided to poison him. Sadly not only the canon died, but his lover was also killed. Nell's punishment was to be buried alive beneath what is known as the Dark Entry; a passageway within the Cathedral. It is said that her ghost can be seen in that place on dark Friday nights. However, legend also has it that anyone who does see Nell is destined to perish soon after. Not too many witnesses then!

In a more relaxed setting, the cloisters are said to be haunted by the ghost of a monk. Those who claim to have seen him report that his face displays an expression of distant thoughtfulness.

More information

Winter opening times: 9am-5pm; The Crypt: 10am-5.30pm. Sundays, throughout the year, including the Crypt, 12.30-2.30pm. Entry charge, unless attending a service: adults £9; concessions £8; children (under 18) £6.



Canterbury Ghost Tour

Turn up at Albery's Wine Bar, St Margaret's Street on Friday or Saturday at 8pm. Also available is an evening tour with three-course meal for pre-booked groups of 15 or more and daytime tours between 10am to 5pm pre-booked groups only. Call 0845 5190267 or email bookings@canterburyghosttour.com. There is a Halloween Special on Monday 31 October at 9.30pm, which must be pre-booked.

Whitstable Ghost Tour

Sundays only, tour the strangely named alleyways and lanes and hear stories of smuggling, murder, and death by misadventure. Pre-booked groups of 15 or more only. Call 0845 5190267 or email bookings@canterburyghosttour.com.

Haunted River Tours

Take an Edwardian-style punt on a candlelit ghost hunting trip through the historic centre of Canterbury. With your traditionally dressed chauffeur, sit comfortably on a spacious, cushioned seat and wrap up warm (or hide!) in cosy tartan blankets. Call: 07786 332666 or email: info@canterburypunting.co.uk to book.

Ghost Tours at Shepherd Neame Brewery, Faversham

On Saturday 29 October and Sunday 30 you can find out about unexplained happenings and sightings as actors bring some of the ghostly tales to life. Call: 01795 542285.

Reculver Towers

This English Heritage property is open for free during daylight hours. For more details see www.english-heritage.org.uk