

Haigh Hall- Ghost Hunt – Nigel Finch

It was Friday 30th March 2007 that Wigan writer Nigel Finch took up the challenge issued by Fright Nights, to spend the night in Haigh Hall. Nigel is the author behind 'Lady Mabel – The Ghost of Haigh Hall' published last November.

"I really didn't know what to expect: images of Mabel or maybe one of the Earls floating across the floor, or a few staged events set up to thrill us. Although I have a keen interest in the spirit world I can also be a little sceptical and will always look for other reasons why something strange may have happened.

We arrived at the Hall at 20:50, there were approx 20 people including my wife and I, all waiting nervously for the event to begin, not really knowing what to expect. Fiona the host from Fright Nights took us through the itinerary and then onto a tour of the building itself. This part of the night was especially interesting for me, as it allowed access to the upper floors, usually out of bounds for visitors. This is where you gained a real feeling for what life was like for the Earl's of Crawford & Balcarres, when the Hall was their family home. As we entered the upper floor corridor you could sense the atmosphere. The air smelt of old timbers and dust. Bare floorboards creaked as we made our way towards the rooms where we would spend most of the night. The walls were mainly bare with the exception of the residual piece of wallpaper dating back to a time long gone by. You could easily imagine the Lords and Ladies leaving their quarters, dressed up and making their way downstairs to the ballroom for another gathering of Lancashire's aristocracy. On this upper level we visited the Nursery, a large room with large windows on two sides, in which the Lindsey babies were cared for. A few steps down, across a smaller room and you enter the 'School Room'. Low level desks complete with ink wells carefully lined up in a row as if a lesson had just ended. A place where the Lindsey children were educated by their personal teacher who would probably struggle from time to time just to keep the mischievous children in order.

At this stage the host informed the group of the alleged sightings of Captain Edward John Smith who was at the helm of the Titanic when it sank. The Captain is said to walk the upper corridor right where we stood. Apparently the Captain had visited and stayed at Haigh Hall prior to his demise.

Ghost or no ghosts I was amazed by the ambience of these untouched rooms, in which you could clearly visualise life with the Lords of this Manor Hall.

Later we were graced by the arrival of Rachel, a physic medium from Liverpool who delivered a very interesting and entertaining session on the differences between ghosts and spirits i.e. ghost are an image of previous times, for example a memory on the landscape. These ghosts cannot be communicated with as they are simply a memory, whereas spirits are energies that can interact with the living. Rachel was nothing like we'd expected, i.e. goth like with long back hair and marching eye liner with a spooky personality. Rachel was a very pleasant, approachable colourful individual who you could pass in the street and never know what she could see or hear.

When we returned to the Nursery we all formed a circle and joined hands. Rachel asked the group if any names had popped into their minds as they entered the room,

several answered 'Eddie or Edward at the same time. After a few minutes Rachel informed us of a young man named Donny who had joined us. This young man was dressed in a football kit, possibly dating back to the 1930's, so not the kind of spirit we were expecting. Certain members of the group openly stated that they could feel him stood behind them. Later in the same room the medium saw the spirit of a disabled young man called 'Drew' who had a low mental age, possibly kept out of the way to protect him from bullying. It was in this room that Rachel picked up the energy of George, a large man dressed in leather. The smell of the leathers was also picked up by other members of the group as George walked around the room eyeing us all up individually; we wondered whether we were welcome here or not. When entering the room members of the group

Leaving the Nursery you enter a smaller room, which had a real eerie feeling about it. First of all Rachel saw the spirit of a sad young girl who had once worked at the hall, next an energy of a young lady named Elizabeth, mid thirties with auburn hair, who had drowned. Rachel also picked up on a spirit called Jeremy Lawless who also was visiting this room.

Myself, I didn't see any spirits or ghost. However what I did experience was the changing of temperatures and atmospheres in the different rooms. Certain rooms had a heavy atmosphere whilst others felt empty. This would change during the night possibly as the spirits moved from room to room. I was hoping for contact with Lady Mabel herself or even Sir William de Bradshaighe, but I was out of luck. I guess they've probably more important things to do.

Haigh Hall contains a wealth of history and secrets from the past. The current hall was built in the 1800's by James Lindsay Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, however the original building dates back to the late 12th century. Hopefully it will still be around for hundred's of years for future generations to enjoy.

Have you a ghost story to tell?

The next project for Nigel Finch is to publish a book of ghost stories experienced by the people of Wigan and surrounding areas. If you have come face to face with the unexplained then email to Nigel@nigelfinch.com you could see your story captured in print for everyone to read.