



Introduction to Ghost Hunting – Part Two

A free course by Fiona Broome, founder of HollowHill.com

Welcome to part two of our free, four-part course in basic ghost hunting, presented by Hollow Hill, the ghost hunters' website. <http://www.HollowHill.com/>

In this week's lesson, we'll talk about finding haunted places, and how to evaluate them.

If you have any questions during this course – or as a ghost hunter – be sure to let us know at Hollow Hill. Use the Contact link at the top of every webpage (or from our homepage, if you're reading one of the old pages).

This lesson appears online at
<http://www.hollowhill.com/courses/IGH/part2.htm>

Be sure to listen to Fiona's additional information at
<http://www.hollowhill.com/courses/IGH/IntroGhostHunting-Part2.mp3>

How to find haunted places



It may be easier to find haunted places than you think. Your best resource will be your friends, and people who've grown up in your area.

However, many people are embarrassed to admit that they believe in ghosts. Others don't like to talk about ghosts and haunted places.

They think that it's 'bad luck' or that it's against their religious beliefs.

To open the conversation, you might talk about ghost-related TV shows.

Start with TV shows

Ghost-related TV shows are popular now, so that's usually the best place to start a conversation. Focus on any popular ghost TV show you've seen.

Ask a friend, 'Do you watch the Ghost Hunters TV show?' (Other recommended shows include Ghost Whisperer, Paranormal State or Most Haunted.)

If the person replies with a firm, 'No', you should drop the subject.

If the person has watched the show, or suggests another ghost show, or starts talking about ghosts, you can ask if they've ever heard of a haunted place nearby.

(This is an ideal time to ask if they'd like to explore a few haunted places with you, so you don't go ghost hunting alone.)

At Halloween

The week before Halloween, almost every local newspaper runs a story related to a local, haunted place. This gives you several opportunities to learn about haunted places.

First, ask your friends if they've read that newspaper article. Ask if the location in the article is really haunted. Ask if they've ever heard of other haunted places nearby. Chances are, they'll remember other spooky locations, or they'll know someone with a haunted house.



We also recommend visiting the place that was mentioned by the newspaper. The best time to visit – besides Halloween – is during a weekend afternoon. Other people are likely to be there, looking for evidence of ghosts. In our experience, those people are likely to be chatty and know a few other local places that are haunted. Take notes!

(Also ask if they know any local ghost hunting groups, and if those groups are good.)

More newspaper research

Because newspapers like to talk about a 'new' haunted location each year, you may find some good information in past Halloween issues of the paper. Sometimes, those past issues are online. If not, most public libraries keep back issues of local newspapers, in stacks or on microfilm.

While you're at the library, ask the Reference librarian if he or she knows anything about local ghost stories. Generally, it's smart to call this 'folklore' or 'legends'.

Also, check local folklore books at the library. We've found some reliable and accurate stories there. We've also found quirky references to local, haunted places in regional history books from the late 19th century, when Spiritualism was popular.

Visit the local newspaper office to read back issues of the paper. Talk with their Entertainment editor if you can. That's not the only resource at the newspaper, but he or she often knows several haunted locations that they're keeping 'in reserve' for future Halloween issues.

The police

If you know someone who works as a police officer or dispatcher, he or she may be a great source of information.

The police know the locations that generate calls, especially where there's no explanation for what's reported.

For example, they're called when a security alarm goes off... but there's no reason for it. (In some locations, ghosts seem to enjoy setting off alarms.) The alarm calls annoy the police, and – after awhile – they realize that the alarms are set off by something unexplained. Sometimes, the police will talk about those locations and other eerie events.

One New Hampshire police chief happily listed every 'cold spot' he'd encountered during his 20+ years on the force. He was delighted to be able to 'talk shop' with us, and described an unusual 'hot spot' he'd found in a nearby woods.

A Texas police officer gave us a personal tour of two haunted cemeteries, pointing out the most haunted graves. He'd found us at one cemetery after hours, and cheerfully showed us around after he realized that we're researchers, not thrill seekers.

Regional books

Thanks to the popularity of ghost hunting, there are many new books about haunted places. Some are awful, but some of them are very good. Look for books that establish a pattern to hauntings. In my book, [Ghosts of Austin, Texas](#), I explain that many buildings constructed by Abner Cook are haunted. If you're in that part of Texas and you want to find a haunting, research Abner Cook... or read my book. Cook's buildings aren't the only Austin pattern I describe. I also describe a pattern related to “Jack the Ripper” stories in Austin.

In addition, look for well-researched books that cover new ground, so to speak. One of my favorites in 2008 was [Haunted Hikes of NH](#). It includes off-the-beaten-path haunted sites in the Granite State, especially along great hiking trails. (When those trails are in or near campgrounds, you'll have ample opportunity for legal, late night ghost investigations.)

Ghost tours

If your community has a regular ghost tour, that's a great way to get started. Go on the tour, note the locations, and return to them for your own research.

Most ghost tours focus on public places that you can visit on your own. Some give you access to privately owned locations, too. We recommend evaluating tour presentations carefully. Many ghost tours mix genuine history with urban legends and impressive theatrics. It's important to verify every story. In some cases, only about 20% of the tale is true.

Here's a classic example: In New Orleans' French Quarter, most ghost tours stop at the infamous Lalaurie Mansion. Many tour guides describe – in lurid detail – how an abused servant girl leaped to her death from a window on the top floor of the home. Tourists dutifully take pictures of that third floor, hoping for orbs or other ghostly evidence.

However, when Madame Lalaurie lived there, the house had only two floors. The third was a later addition, long after the time of the horrific stories that make the Lalaurie Mansion the high point of many local ghost tours.

Madame Lalaurie only lived in that house for a few years. If you want to see where she spent far more time, check the site of her former home on Royal Street. When I was last there, it was an antiques shop just a few feet away from the delightfully haunted Brennan's Restaurant. (Brennan's has some of the best food in New Orleans, too.)

You'll learn more stories like these in my book, *The Ghosts of New Orleans' French Quarter*. (I'm writing it during late 2009.)

Websites

Although the easiest to research, we place websites low on our list of resources. Many of them simply copy from each other. Even the original online story may have been a misquote from a book of folklore.

For example, HollowHill.com was the first website to describe the hauntings at New Hampshire's Gilson Road cemetery.

We provided the information for the Halloween 2000 Nashua (NH) newspaper article.

We've also used that site as a reliable training spot for new members of our research team.



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So, many people know about Gilson's ghosts.

However, when we visit some other people's websites, we find impossible and ridiculous stories about Gilson Road cemetery, and very misleading directions to the site. Clearly, the authors of the webpages have never been there. They're just building on others' stories.

At least two websites report tales of the ghost of "Mary Miller Jason" of the Old Burial Yard in York, Maine. They're repeating an error in a regional ghost book. According to the haunted gravestone, the ghost's name is actually Mary *Nasson*.

We *do* use the Internet to research ghost stories. Then, we look for additional information to confirm each story, before visiting the site. If the ghost has a first and last name, we check FamilySearch.org to see if they have genealogical information about the ghost.

(For example, Mary Nasson of York, Maine, *is* listed there, with an alternate spelling of Mary Nason. A typo from the Nason spelling probably explains the 'Jason' surname error.)

So, if you're using websites for research, confirm every story with at least one other, more reliable source.

There are plenty of true, *unexplained* hauntings, but most have some historical foundation.

The 'creepy' feeling

Many of our best discoveries have resulted from research where someone on our team said that it *felt* haunted when he or she passed by. We had no other reason to visit those locations.

In most cases, these sites aren't haunted. The place's history or visual cues create a feeling of discomfort or dread, and that's all. It may be chilling, but it's not ghostly.

However, a significant number of sites that seem a little odd – or even chilling – have turned out to be haunted.

So, once you've exhausted all *known* haunts, try a few places that – for no clear reason – have always given you a chill.

Local ghost hunting groups

Sometimes, there's no point in looking for haunted places. Local ghost hunting groups have already done the research for you. You can accompany them on investigations; they'll keep you busy!

People often ask us how to locate ghost hunting groups. If you don't hear about them when you talk with people about haunted places, the Internet is a good resource.

While some ghost hunting clubs are excellent, we more often hear about groups that are amateurish and/or clique-ish. That's normal, since ghost hunting has become so trendy.

Politics seems to do the most damage. Here's the usual pattern: A group is organized. A disagreement occurs, or some unqualified person tries to take charge. After a heated exchange, one or more people create a rival ghost hunting group, and try to seize the limelight.

It becomes more about celebrity than research.

In other cases, a ghost hunting group may be more of a social hangout than an organized team for serious research.

The exceptions are currently in the minority, but they do exist.

The safest way to judge a group from a distance is how long it's been around and what people say about it. You're looking for any group that is generally praised and has been researching for at least two years.

Never commit to long-term membership until you've spent enough time with the group to feel that they're worth your time. I recommend going on ghost hunts with them for over a month, or at least three or four investigations.

In a later lesson and the Part Four audio recording (MP3), I'll talk more about evaluating ghost hunting groups and forming your own group. Meanwhile, let's talk about choosing locations for your ghost hunts.

Evaluating haunted sites

No matter how convincing the stories are, we research haunted sites before investing the time and energy in a full investigation. Our first steps include:

A casual, daytime visit to the site, to see what's there. We check the most likely spots for EMF, usually with a hiking compass. We usually take an experienced psychic investigator with us, to see what he or she feels about the location. We also look for nearby landmarks, especially historical markers or places of note. We'll research them further, in case they shed some light on the stories and possible hauntings.

Basic historical and genealogical research. We're looking for evidence of the ghost (if he or she has a name) and events that could support residual energy hauntings at the very least.

We recommend checking some or all of these resources:



If the ghost has a name, search at FamilySearch.org to see if there's any evidence of that person existing. (At the very least, the family surname should exist in local records around the time that the ghost supposedly lived there.) Though that database isn't reliable, it *is* one of the most complete genealogical listings online, and it searches on 'sounds like' names as well as whatever you enter.

Visit the local historical society and ask them about the location and/or the people in the ghost stories. (Tell them that you're researching or writing a paper about local folklore. While some historical societies are interested in ghosts, most are uneasy and protective of local historical sites. They worry – unfortunately, with good reason – about popularity leading to vandalism.)

If the site has a staff, maintenance crew or other regular workers, ask them if they've heard about the ghosts there, or if they've had any odd experiences. (Again, it's best to say that you're researching local folklore.)

Check the public library. Ask the Reference librarian if he or she has any material about the site, especially its ghosts. Even if the only references are historical, they can provide clues. You're looking for events with intense emotional content, and tragedies.

If your town has a genealogical library, visit it and ask about the family name and the location. Genealogists are people who research the history of families... their roots. Often, a genealogist is delighted to find someone who's equally interested in a family that he or she has researched.

Also, at the historical society, public library or genealogical library, look for historical maps featuring the haunted site. They can be excellent resources. When researching ghosts in Tyngsborough, Massachusetts, we found a 19th century map that actually had a note (and an arrow) indicating "the haunted house."

Summary

In this lesson, we've discussed how to find places that might be haunted. From local legends to regional books to ghost tours, you may discover several good locations for your research.

We've also described several ways you can research sites with ghost stories. You're looking for actual evidence to support the stories. In some cases, you'll realize that the tales are merely urban legends. But, when the ghost stories have a foundation, your historical research can be tremendously helpful.

When you know what really happened at a site, you'll know what you're looking for. For example, researchers with a psychic sense of smell may notice a smoke odor in a location that's haunted because of a fire. (We'll talk about types of perceptions in a future lesson.)

If you know exactly where certain events happened – which area of the park, or which room in the building – you can focus your initial investigation there.

If you know related dates, such as the anniversary of a tragedy, your research on that date may be far more productive than on other days.

Finding a haunted site is great, but that's just the first step. Your pre-investigation research can make a huge difference in your success as a ghost hunter.

Recommended homework

These steps are optional, but they can help your progress as a ghost hunter.

1. Identify two or three possibly haunted places near your home, school or workplace.
2. List them in your ghost hunting journal, if you're keeping one.
3. Choose one location to research. Find out as much as you can about the site, its history and evidence for the ghost stories. Search online, and visit at least one offline resource (historical society, public library) to find additional information that may support (or refute) the site's stories.
4. With a friend or two, visit the location in the daytime and see if there's any physical or psychic evidence of hauntings.
5. Locate at least one ghost hunting group in your area. Search at Google, Yahoo, etc., using the name of your city or town, plus the word "ghosts." If that doesn't work, try your county name and the word "ghosts." If that still doesn't help, try your state or regional name, and the word "ghosts."
6. If you don't find a local group, or none of them are right for you, start asking friends if they'd be interested in ghost hunting at dusk or later.
7. If you think that you may have enough people -- and collective expertise -- to try a ghost hunt, choose a well-known haunted site (a place that's open to the public) and visit it shortly before dusk. (This will probably be the location you visited in step 4, above.)

Your next lesson will arrive by email in about a week. In the meantime, if you have questions, use the 'Contact us' link at HollowHill.com. Though we can't personally answer every question, we'll do our best to respond with notes in future lessons, and/or with articles at our website.