

***In Search of Ghostly Black Dogs***  
**By**  
**Nick Redfern**

Some time ago, a hefty package of titles arrived in my mailbox, courtesy of Bob Trubshaw's British-based Heart of Albion Press ([www.hoap.co.uk](http://www.hoap.co.uk)) - a company that puts out some great titles on British folklore, cryptozoology and unsolved mysteries, including *Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America*, written by Simon Burchell.

Few people that have read Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* can forget those immortal words uttered by Dr. James Mortimer to the world's most famous fictional detective: "Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"

It may come as a surprise to some people to learn that Conan Doyle's novel was actually based upon real legends of giant, devilish hounds that were said to haunt Britain's villages and countryside, bringing doom, tragedy and death in their spectral and demonic wake. Yep: Britain has a long, rich and varied history of encounters with what have generally become known as "Phantom Black Dogs."

Usually much larger than normal dogs, they are said to possess a pair of large, glowing eyes (very often red); they frequent graveyards, old roadways, crossroads and bridges; and are almost unanimously associated with the realm of the dead.

In some cases, the beasts appear to be demonstrably evil; while in other reports evidence is exhibited of a helpful - perhaps even concerned - nature. But whatever these critters are, they are not your average flesh and blood animal. They might just be your worst nightmare.

And while the image of the Phantom Black Dog is most associated with the British Isles and mainland Europe, the beast has been seen in many other locations too - including throughout Latin America, as Simon Burchell's new title definitively reveals.

Running at 38 pages, *Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America* is obviously very much a booklet rather than a full-length book. But that doesn't detract from the most important thing of all: its pages are packed with case after case, each offering the reader little-known and seldom-seen information on the definitive Latin American cousin to Britain's more famous counterpart.

What impresses and intrigues me most of all about Burchell's publication is the truly startling wealth of similarities between those creatures seen centuries ago in England, and those reported throughout Latin America in the last 100 years: namely, the diabolical, glowing eyes; the association that the phantom hound has with life after death; how seeing the beast may be a precursor to doom and tragedy; its occasional helpful and guiding qualities; the fact that the animal is usually witnessed in the vicinity of bridges,

crossroads, and cemeteries; its ability to shape-shift and change in size; and not forgetting the most important thing, of course, its perceived paranormal origins.

Burchell also reveals how the legends of the phantom black dog of some Latin American nations - such as Guatemala - have been exploited by those with draconian and outdated morals. For example, there are widespread tales of people that enjoy having a drink or several incurring the dire wrath of the phantom black dog - which, as Burchell says: "...was certainly popularized by the Catholic Church which used this legend and others as moralizing tales."

Winged hounds - whose appearance and activities smack strongly of the modern day Chupacabras - are discussed; as are copious amounts of data that make a link with tales of a truly dark nature.

Burchell also reveals intriguing data suggesting that at least some tales of the black dog might be based upon cultural memories and stories of very real, large and ferocious hounds brought to the New World by the Conquistadors centuries ago - "savage and ferocious dogs to kill and tear apart the Indians."

That said, however, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of reports of the phantom black dog in Latin America parallel those of Britain to a truly striking, eerie and extraordinary degree - in the sense that they appear to be something other than flesh-and-blood entities.

A Brit, Burchell lived in the highlands of western Guatemala for three years, and knows his stuff. And his is a great little publication written by someone with a passion not just for his subject matter, but for the cultures and countries that appear within its pages.

As Burchell states: "Although the Black Dog may appear at first glance to be a British or north European phenomenon, it exists in essentially the same form across the entire length and breadth of the Americas. Much has been written upon the presumed Germanic, Celtic or Indio-European origin of the legend but such an origin would not explain how a highland Maya girl can meet a shape-shifting Black Dog at a Guatemalan crossroads. It appears that the Black Dog, much like the poltergeist, is a global phenomenon."

Readers outside of the UK should note that *Phantom Black Dogs in Latin America* is only available from Britain; and therefore if you wish to purchase a copy, it is recommended that you contact the publisher Bob Trubshaw for shipping rates, payment methods, etc. at [albion@indigogroup.co.uk](mailto:albion@indigogroup.co.uk)