

What To Do (and Not Do) On A Ghost Hunt

The successful key to any investigation of alleged "hauntings" is to perform a vigil; these usually , but not always occur at night and only once the location has been assessed for any obvious hoaxes or misidentification of nature phenomena, such as settling of timbers in a house, or a river running beneath it.

The following list is merely intended as a guide to help eliminate or reduce the time wasted during investigations.

- * Each member of the team should carry a torch, note pad and spare pens. Silence is of paramount importance and any event should be noted (complete with the time) such that other teams in different locations can correlate results to eliminate natural/accidental noises. In some situations, some small noise is tolerable: it is up to the people involved to judge for themselves.

- * Always ensure that you have a good supply of batteries, fuses and spare bulbs. If you have any audio or video equipment again, please ensure that you have a sufficient supply of tape. This tape should be "virgin" tape (that is, not previously used) and should still be sealed in its wrapper. This eliminates the possibility of spurious results caused by old recordings.

- * A "red filter" of cellophane over a torch will ensure that the impact of harsh light on your 'night vision' is minimised.

- * Don't wear clothing that makes rustling noises etc. when you move; for instance, leather jackets. However, you should take a supply of warm clothing, since during night vigils in particular, the temperature can drop. Also, if you on an outside vigil, regardless of the weather, don't forget to take waterproof clothing, an umbrella, wellington boots etc.

- * If you use long lengths of cable (such as the rerouting of video signals), please ensure that it is adequately shielded from radio interference. Mobile telephones should, if possible, be avoided on vigils.

- * Make sure that your equipment is adequately insured, and that whomever uses it knows some of the basic features (for instance, don't point an image intensifier at a light bulb when it is switched on).

- * You may need to pay the owners of the property something towards insurance, staffing costs etc. Indeed, if you go on regular vigils, or investigations, you should consider taking out insurance to cover yourself against breakages.

* Equipment need not be expensive: graphite powder can be used to check for footprints if you suspect covert entry to a sealed zone; similarly black thread can be used as a check. A cheap compass will tell you if the magnetic field in the vicinity alters, and a thermometer (preferably of the type that records temperatures) can provide good results. Cheap infra-red burglar alarms can provide good notification of entry. Naturally, all doors and windows to a zone should be sealed or locked, but beware that rats can set off such alarms.

* Please be prepared to provide addresses of references or character witnesses if you are investigating private property: it places the owner's mind at ease.

* Never take strong smelling foods or perfumes on vigils since these may prevent detection of olfactory effects.

* Take the strap off any camera you may take with you. Several ghost pictures have been the result of the strap being inadvertently photographed.

* Most importantly probably- only ever tell the details of the investigations to those who really need to know- this prevents contaminating participants with false hopes and expectations which might colour their judgement.

A good book that discusses the basics of vigils and describes a few case hauntings is:

"Ghostwatching- The Ghosthunter's Handbook" by John Spencer and Tony Wells, published by Virgin Books, 1995. ISBN 0-86369-719-4.