

# Meet the next generation: Rachael Ironside.

IRONSIDE, R.

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# Rachael Ironside

Rachael earned a Ph.D. at the University of York in 2016 under the supervision of Robin Wooffitt with a thesis titled "Interactional dynamics and the production of collective experience: the case of paranormal research groups." She is a senior lecturer at Robert Gordon University.

How did your interest in parapsychological topics develop?

When I was studying for my undergraduate degree at the University of Aberdeen, I helped to establish a paranormal research group called East of Scotland Paranormal. Aberdeen, at that time, did not really speak about its ghosts but has a rich and long history. I was really interested to learn about the heritage and stories of the city, and as we started to explore Aberdeen, stories of ghosts and haunted buildings began to surface. I was fascinated by this, and as we started to collect stories and carry out investigations, I became increasingly interested in learning more. One moment in particular that inspired my current research occurred during an investigation into an old prison in Aber-

deen. As we were taking a break, I looked towards one of the doorways and saw what appeared to be a figure standing there. It was very late, and I could not quite establish whether the figure was 'real' or my imagination. As I was contemplating this, the investigator I was with asked if I could see someone standing in the doorway, and then proceeded to describe the figure. Her description was the same as the 'image' I was also seeing. Since that time, I have been fascinated by collective experiences and how we come to understand these events as being paranormal.

What has been your biggest accomplishment at this point?

The accomplishment I am proudest of to date is hosting the Supernat-

...  
Aberdeen,  
United Kingdom

Research Interests:  
paranormal experience,  
social interaction,  
embodiment, storytelling,  
and supernatural  
tourism

Online:  
[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rachael\\_Ironside/info](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rachael_Ironside/info)

ural in Contemporary Society Conference in 2018. The purpose of this conference was to provide a forum for cross-disciplinary research in the supernatural, and to focus on the value and role of the supernatural in our contemporary world. It was an honor to host academics from across the world to showcase their research from diverse topics such as sociology, tourism, psychology, media, literary studies, anthropology, heritage, journalism, and more. We also linked these discussions with industry exploring the role of the supernatural for heritage and tourism. I believe there is real value in cross-disciplinary research in our area, and it was a privilege to provide an opportunity for these discussions.

### What are your short and long-term plans for future research projects?

Currently, my research is focusing on supernatural storytelling and its role in helping us to engage with heritage, place, and community. I have recently completed a funded project on the Orkney Isles working with local storytellers, musicians, and illustrators to develop a digital app called the Orkney Folklore Trail in collaboration with our School of Computing Science and Digital

Media. I am also working in collaboration with academics in media, heritage, and the social sciences to develop an event and project as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences. This project includes the collection of local supernatural folklore from Aberdeenshire. Stories will be exhibited at the event, as well as the opportunity for guests to engage with the social sciences, and activities to encourage young people to reimagine supernatural stories through comic book illustrations. Longer term, I intend to continue this focus and explore further routes for cross-disciplinary work. I also intend to continue my research into social interaction and paranormal experience.

### What is the best piece of advice you have received from a mentor?

My Ph.D. supervisor taught me the incredibly important skill of building resilience. He was tough, but fair, throughout my Ph.D. process, and I always appreciated his honesty on my work. You need to be resilient in academia, and more so in this area of research, so having opportunities to develop that early on is incredibly helpful. I am also very grateful to my colleague, Craig Leith, who taught me to have a sense of humor

and not take things too seriously. Academia is a tough world; there is a lot of critique and often more failures than successes, so you really have to develop a mindset that enables you to overcome these. For me, having a sense of humor really helps.

### What advice do you have for students just getting started in the field?

There is a fantastic community of people in this area, who have probably been through similar challenges, and can offer advice and mentorship. I have always been blown away by the generosity of other academics in this field. I am always delighted to speak to new students who drop me an email and express an interest in the topic, or are just looking for a bit of guidance and support in their own area. I would encourage anyone starting in the field to reach out to the wider community and make the most of any opportunities to meet and network with colleagues in this area.