The allure of dark tourism: legend tripping and ghost seeking in dark places.

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CHAPTER 5

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The Grey Friars Kirk of Edinburgh is the site of one of Scotland's bloodiest battles of the seventeenth century. It is also where the country's most notorious poltergeist is said to lurk, and is considered by some to be the "scariest place on earth" (Edwards 2014). The Black Mausoleum in the kirkyard is the resting place of Sir George McKenzie, nicknamed Bloody McKenzie for his role in the persecution of the Covenantors under the rule of King Charles II. It is estimated that Bloody McKenzie was responsible for upwards of eighteen thousand deaths of his fellow countrymen, many of whom were tortured before being buried in the same Kirkyard in which McKenzie ultimately found his resting place. Legend tells of an incident in 1998 when a local homeless man broke into the Black Mausoleum to seek shelter from bad weather. During the night the man reportedly began vandalizing the tomb. The ground below him opened up, and he fell into a pit of plague victim remains buried below the structure. Terrified, the man fled the scene, never to be heard from again. A few days later unusual activity started to occur around the mausoleum: one women passing the tomb was blasted backward by a cold force, and another was found unconscious beside the structure with unusual brusing and marks on her neck. Since then there have been over five hundred reported incidents of what is believed to be the disturbed poltergeist of Bloody McKenzie returning to seek revenge on the living.

Walking down the cobbled streets of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh, it is not unusual to come across several tours offering the opportunity to hear about, and possibly encounter, the city's haunted past. The legend of the McKenzie poltergeist is, however, somewhat iconic amongst both locals and visitors. Even before the ghostly activity was reported, the resting place of Bloody McKenzie was

considered to have supernatural properties; local children dared each other to knock on the tomb's door and chant, "Bluidy Mackingie, come oot if ye daur, lift the sneck and draw the bar!" The challenge would be to run away from the tomb before McKenzie rose from his grave. Fear of visiting the site has been further fueled by reported supernatural attacks and, of the numerous reputedly haunted locations in Edinburgh, the Black Mausoleum is considered the scariest of all. Nevertheless, the site is a popular destination for locals and tourists hoping to experience the poltergeist legend.

The legend of the McKenzie poltergeist is typical of the supernatural folklore associated with many urban areas. Indeed, people commonly grow up with local legends of the abandoned haunted house at the end of the road, the cave in the woods where a witch was once said to live, or some similar supernatural story that was once told—and perhaps still is. These tales often have an attached warning, accompanied by a story of a victim who dared to question the legend and met a perilous end. As explored by Elizabeth Bird (1994), these legends often develop around particular types of places such as cemeteries, abandoned buildings, bridges, and unusual graves. As observed by several folklorists (Bird 1994; Ellis 1996; Holly and Cordy 2007) these sites can become a popular attraction for those interested in legend-tripping.

Bill Ellis (1996a) defined legend-tripping as an excursion to places where something uncanny has allegedly occurred with the intention of experiencing something supernatural. Legend-tripping is often associated with adolescents who, after a few drinks and some scary stories, may decide to visit such a site to test the legend's credibility. For example, Bird (1994) describes how youths visiting the Black Angel monument in Iowa City regulalry engage in rituals and activities to test the veracity of a legend, one that warns of death to those who kiss the angel statue. Likewise, Donald H. Holly Jr. and Casey E. Cordy (2007) note that visitors to purported vampire graves in Rhode Island attempt to summon the vampires' spirits by vandalizing and performing sexual acts on the tombs. The McKenzie poltergeist site has experienced similar forms of legend-tripping. Most dramatic was the 2004 arrest of two teenage boys who broke into the tomb and cut the head off a corpse in the mausoleum, before playing with it in the grounds of the kirkyard (Scott 2004). It is perhaps unsurprising then that

McKenzie's ghost remains restless.

The motivations to legend trip vary. In the case of the Black Angel monument and Rhode Island graves, adolescents were testing the legend. As discussed by Holly and Cordy, this often involves activities designed to "invoke supernatural powers" including performing séances, making offerings, and other rituals related to the legend (2007: 345). For young people these activities can be a "ritual of rebellion" (Ellis 1996b: 438) and "rite of passage" (Bird 1994: 203). Legend tripping provides an opportunity to rebel against the rules and laws implied by normality and engage in activities that play with notions of reality. In these instances, the legends often pertain to issues such as morality, death, sex, grief, and identity. As discussed by Bird (1994), taking part in these activities may provide an opportunity for young people to confront adult concerns and anxieties through these rituals and forms of play.

For others, participating in legend tripping may have more *nefarious* motives. In his discussion on adolescents and "cult" activity, Ellis (1996a), describes how vandalism, graffiti, and the mutilation of animals may have a role in the ostensive play that forms part of the legend-trip. Ellis further discusses how such actions can lead to "satanic rumour-panics" as communities and authorities associate such activity with satanic practices—whereas, in reality, youths are rarely engaging in more than hoaxes and role playing (1996a: 168). There are, however, occasions when the vandalism of graves, desecration of burial sites, and exhumation of corpses (such as the mausoleum example previously mentioned) do form part of legend-tripping activities. An unfortunate example of this is provided by Dennis and Michele Waskul (2016), who discuss the vandalism of tombstones in Loon Lake Cemetery. The desecration of the cemetery is said to be due to its being thought of as a "witch's graveyard" and the ghostly legends that have emerged from this.

While these motives suggest a more complex desire to legend-trip it should be acknowledged that recreation and fun are also widely understood to be reasons for participation. Legend-tripping may be considered "a form of entertainment" (Ellis 1996a: 438), as individuals engage in a "conscious suspension of reality in the interest of fun" (Holly and Cordy 2007: 346). The potential for a

supernatural encounter carries with it exciting and frightening possibilities, much like watching a scary movie or going to a haunted house around the time of Halloween. Moreover, legend-tripping offers participants the ability to temporarily escape the mundane and re-enchant the everyday world through the exploration of such legends (see also Chapter 10).

Legend tripping has long been popular in adolescent subcultures and among other thrill seekers. However, the number of organizations that offer the opportunity to engage in this activity through structured, commercialized experiences has recently significantly risen. The City of the Dead Tours in Edinburgh, for instance, offer brave tourists the opportunity to experience the McKenzie poltergeist for themselves, stating that "an encounter with the poltergeist is the highlight of the tour, with hundreds of people claiming to have been attacked by the entity" (City of the Dead, n.d.). On their digital media sites these tour companies also display photos of some tour participants who have suffered scratching and bruising as a result of their visit. Legend-tripping has become big business, with Dracula tourism attracting over 250,000 visitors to Romania annually (Jamal and Tanase 2005), figures suggesting that the Loch Ness monster is worth £25 million to the local economy (32.3 million in US dollars; "Scotland Sets Up" 2014), and ghost tour operators across the United States reporting over 100,000 visitors per year (Saladino 2015).

This chapter explores the commercialization of legend-tripping. I first investigate how sites associated with death and tragedy have metamorphosed into dark tourist attractions. Next, I discuss how certain dark destinations use ghost legends as a commercial strategy, and examine the reasons that visitors engage in commercial ghost tourism activities. This analysis is informed by a decade of my participation in commercialized legend trips and interviews with ghost tourism participants and organizers. Ultimately, I conclude that the commercialization of dark sites and their ghostly legends provides visitors the opportunity to confront troublesome events of the past and existential questions of the future.

Dark Tourism

In the winter of 2016 I took a road trip with my husband and a couple of friends to Peterhead,

in the north east Scotland. The purpose of our trip was a visit to the newly reopened former Peterhead Prison. Before its closure in December 2013, the prison was well-known for incarcerating some of the worst criminals in the country. As we arrived we found ourselves walking through the original reception area which would have "welcomed" new inmates; our experience, however, was much friendlier. We were greeted by staff who handed each of us an audio guide that gave us a detailed tour of the prison. As we walked the grounds of Peterhead, the guide described prison life and told grisly tales of fights, hostage situations, and murders that had taken place during the prison's 125-year history. We had a chance to hear fascinating accounts of prison life from a former guard who was held hostage during a notorious riot in 1987. Guides also showed us a cell in which an unnamed inmate had a workshop in which he created children's toys. There was something quite sinister about the solitary children's toy placed in the room, and mystery was heightened by the ambiguity of the prisoner's identity. On the way home, we all spun stories and legends of our own, guessing at the dark memories that were trapped within the cold stone walls of this cell and the many others we toured that day. We were caught up in the macabre history of Peterhead Prison, engaged in the creation of lore about a site that had been anything but fascinating to those who had inhabited it only a few years prior. In short, on this day we were the epitome of "dark tourists."

The definition of dark tourism has been debated by several researchers, but it is generally defined as tourism to "sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre" (Stone 2006: 146). It has also been called "thanotourism" (Seaton 1996: 234), "morbid tourism" (Blom 2000: 29) and "black-spot tourism" (Rojeck 1993: 142). The term, while fairly new in academic research, has grown in notoriety in recent years as the popularity of dark tourism sites has increased with the now commonplace commercialization of death and tragedy (Coldwell 2013). Perhaps some of the best-known dark tourism hotspots include Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Cambodian killing fields, and Ground Zero—however, sites may also include castles, old hospitals, and graveyards to name a few. Around the globe destinations promote sites of death and suffering to entice visitors. Indeed, as explored in Raymond Powell and Katia Iankova's (2016) study, London's dark sites (including the London Dungeon and Tower Bridge Experience) are some of the most popular in the area and significant

boosters for the local economy. Auschwitz-Birkenau has also seen a significant rise in tourism in recent years, attracting over two million visitors in 2016 ("Auschwitz" 2016). Similarly, twenty-three million people have visited the Ground Zero memorial since its opening in 2011 (9/11 Memorial 2015).

As identified by several researchers (Sharpley 2005; Stone 2006), not all dark sites are the same, and they could be considered to exist on a spectrum of darkness with sites associated with death (such as museums and re-enactments) at the lightest end and those sites of death (such as concentration camps and locations of genocide) at the darkest end (Stone 2006). As Phillip Stone (2006) discusses further, different forms of dark tourism can be identified along this spectrum. At the lighter end Dark Fun Factories cater to providing entertaining experiences of macabre events, and at the darkest edges Dark Camps of Genocide present the opportunity to reflect on events of "genocide, atrocity and catastrophe" (157). Thus, visitors may be motivated to take part in dark tourism for reasons including remembrance (Dunkley, Morgan and Westwood 2011; Yuill 2003), entertainment (Stone 2009; Walby and Piché 2011) and curiosity (Bigley et al 2010; Yuill 2003).

While the commercialization of death for the consumption of modern-day tourists is a fairly recent phenomena, the desire to visit places of death and suffering is not new. In fact, bearing witness to suffering and death has long been a form of entertainment, commemoration, and condemnation. The gladiatorial games of ancient Rome, for instance, provided a spectacle of death that attracted a significant audience. As a form of entertainment, these bloody games distracted the audience members from their own hardships and reminded them of the power wielded by their rulers. Pilgrimages to sites of burial and death constitute a second form of witnessing. For thousands of years, humans have made ritualized journeys to sacred burial grounds to honor the dead and reflect on their own mortality. Lastly, public executions have a long history as a method of social control. Whether they were intended to condemn those who violated the most fundamental moral principles of a society or to frighten an entire population into submission, these public displays of deadly force offered witnesses a morality tale about the ultimate cost of deviating from social norms and values. In each of these three forms of bearing witness, the reality of death is openly acknowledged and—in the cases of gladiatorial games

and executions—directly observed. This is in stark contrast to today's dark tourism, which maintains a distance between death and the tourist.

For most people in Western society, the thought of witnessing death is now an abhorrent and unthinkable prospect, particularly on the grisly scale often associated with dark sites. Indeed, as discussed by Phillipe Aries (1981), death is somewhat invisible in westernized society. It is hidden away from the public gaze, quietly dealt with behind the doors of medical facilities, religious institutions, and funeral homes. Stone (2012) suggests that these practices have led society into death denying, in which people are preoccupied with preserving life rather than embracing the inevitability of death. Others, such as Bob Pagliari (2004), argue that dark tourism contributes to a state of death deriding, in which entertainment and commercial outlets offer paying customers an opportunity to vicariously experience death. The increasing popularity of dark tourism is considered by some to be a reaction to this increased distance between death and the individual (Stone and Sharpley 2008; Stone 2012). By creating sites that enable tourists to learn about and gaze on the past death of others, dark tourism provides a mechanism through which death in modern society may be both confronted and held at arm's length.

As one might expect, the commercialization of sites of suffering and death is controversial. Critics are especially sensitive to the commercial exploitation of events that could be considered at the darkest end of spectrum (Stone 2006), such as mass atrocities or recent disasters that resulted in massive casualties. An article in *National Geographic*, titled "Is 'Dark Tourism' OK?", frames dark tourism as disrespectful and voyeuristic (Reid 2016). It describes a trend of taking selfies at dark sites and recounts how Justin Bieber referred to Anne Frank as a "Belieber" during his visit to the Anne Frank House. In contrast, Roxanna Magee and Audrey Gilmore (2015) claim that the experience of visiting dark tourist sites is nonetheless important, in that it facilitates personal consideration of the meanings of tragic events. Thus, sites should supply dark history and events to consumers in a way that is sensitive to their context but that also provides the engaging and potentially transformative experience tourists are seeking.

One way that dark tourism is increasingly managed is through engagement with legends

attached to the location. Legend-tripping at dark sites is not actively recognized as a motivation in the current dark tourism literature, but supernatural stories are regularly used by certain sites to attract tourists. Dark legend-tripping could be considered at the lighter end of Philip Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum with entertainment often at the forefront of the experience supplied to tourists. Two examples of this include the emergence of Dracula tourism in Romania, and the attractions created around the Salem Witch trials in the United States (Bristow and Newman, 2004). In both cases destinations have capitalized on the historic legends and stories attached to place in order to present dark events in a compelling but acceptable way (at least for the tourist). Through the commercialization of legends at dark sites, tourists' experience of encountering the death of others—and reflecting on their own mortality—is mediated through forms of entertainment, education, and a more structured form of legend-tripping. During my research I have observed this strategy being increasingly adopted by dark sites with a particular focus on the commercialization of ghostly legends and encounters.

Ghost Seeking in Dark Places

Following my visit to Peterhead Prison I learned that in the short time it had been open the attraction had already hosted a Halloween event at which visitors were invited to tour the prison at night.[1] On that Halloween the ghostly potential of the prison was sold to visitors as an opportunity to experience "screams in the night and fleeting images of former inmates now long gone" (Eventbrite, n.d.). A couple of months later I learned that a local paranormal group had investigated the site, and that the reality-style ghost hunting television show *Most Haunted* would be filming an episode in the prison. It is apparent that Peterhead Prison has already begun harnessing the economic potential of its dark history.

The association between dark sites and ghost seeking is not unusual, and perhaps somewhat expected. After all, throughout history, ghosts have been associated with sites of tragedy, death, and suffering. They are, thus, almost intrinsically linked with sites that are dark in nature. However, in the last ten to fifteen years there has been an increased commercialization of not only the dark heritage of

[1] Peterhead Prison opened its doors to the paying public in June 2016 and hosted its first Halloween event on Friday, October 28, 2016.

these sites, but the resident ghosts that haunt them. Dennis Waskul defines these as "commercial ghosts" (see Chapter 3), and their popularity has led to an increased interest and participation in ghost tourism.

Ghost tourism is defined by Beatriz Rodriguez Garcia as "the desire to encounter ghosts, interest in the supernatural, and visitation of places associated with the spirit world such as cemeteries, haunted houses, castles, and historic towns" (2012:14). It is worth noting that ghosts as an attraction are not necessarily a new phenomenon; for instance, the case of the Cock Lane Ghost in 1762 drew substantial crowds to a small lane in London. As a result, businesses in the area benefited significantly from the increased trade. Similarly, the Fox sisters—most notable for starting the Spiritualist movement in the United States—attracted many people to their small family home in upstate New York with their claims that they could communicate with the spirit of a murdered peddler via rapping on walls and furniture. This led to a financially lucrative nationwide tour for the three sisters—Maggie, Kate, and Leah—throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century (Weisberg 2005; also see Hunter, Chapter Six in this volume). Historically these cases were fairly infrequent, but in recent years a growing number of businesses and organizations have started offering ghost-related services and experiences (Locker 2014).

The popularization of ghost tourism is undoubtedly influenced by a concurrent supernatural boom in popular culture (see the Introduction). In 2002, the British reality television series *Most Haunted* introduced the notion of amateur paranormal investigation to a broader audience. It was quickly followed by several more shows that focused on the real-life activities of paranormal investigators, including *Ghost Hunters* (debuting in 2004) and *Ghost Adventures* (debuting in 2008). Influenced by these shows, amateur paranormal groups also began to form. Over the past decade the number of paranormal investigation teams has substantially increased, with current figures suggesting that there are approximately 2,500 groups in the United Kingdom (Hill 2010) and upward of 4,000 in the United States as of May 2017 (see http://paranormalsocieties.com; also see Chapter 4). The emergence of television shows dramatizing ghost hunting and the resulting explosion of paranormal

investigation groups have driven increased interest in ghost tourism. This broad category actually takes several forms, which I now describe.

Ghost Walks and Tours

Perhaps the best-known and most popular form of ghost tourism in the ghost walks or tours that are offered in many cities and towns. The cities of York, England, and Edinburgh, Scotland, each have five tours operating under different organizations. As observed by Garcia (2012) ghost walks offer a similar structure, often involving up to thirty guests being taken on a guided walking route and being told ghost stories at landmarks. It should be noted, however, that the ghost tour experience has now evolved beyond just walking tours, with businesses providing ghost boat tours (such as the Dell's Ghost Boat in Wisconsin) and haunted bus tours (such as the Ghost Bus Tours in York).

During ghost tours there is often an emphasis on humor and, as discussed by Robert Thompson, a "nip and bite" of playfulness in the stories that are told (2010: 82). On the ghost walks I attended, guides would regularly recruit audience member to humorously reenact the gruesome final moments of characters from their stories. For instance, one tour guide illustrated the details of a grisly death by pulling fake guts from an audience member's stomach while asking another to hold them, much to the amusement of the crowd. By engaging audiences in this way guides present serious stories (often associated with death and suffering), in a not so serious way. The performative elements of the ghost walks and tours are important because they enable guests to engage with the dark history of a place in ways that are light-hearted and unthreatening (Gentry 2007).

Ghost Hunting

Following the success of popular paranormal investigating television shows in Britain and the United States, numerous organizations began offering public ghost hunting experiences—for a price. These events usually involve participants taking part in ghost vigils, using paranormal equipment, conducting séances, and staying overnight in a reputedly haunted building. While several organizations have come and gone over the past ten to fifteen years some of the longer standing and successful businesses in the United Kingdom and United States include Haunted Happenings, Fright Nights, and

Ghost Hunts USA.

When I first started my research, a visitor interested in attending a ghost hunt would have been charged between $90 and $130 per person to stay overnight in a supposedly haunted building and take part in ghost hunting activities. However, over the last ten years the number of businesses offering these services has increased significantly, leading to increased competition. As a result, it could be argued that the distinction once offered by selling a ghost experience has been reduced, and in line with this, the cost of attending such events has also decreased. Currently, you might pay $30-$50 to attend, perhaps more if an overnight stay is involved. Furthermore, because of the high number of ghost hunts that are now available, the experience itself is somewhat standardized, reducing the mystery and intrigue one might expect from participating. In fact, Garcia (2012) argues it is the predictability and repeatability of paranormal experiences that make them commercially viable to begin with. Through the commercialization and standardization of ghost hunts, ghosts and their stories are now a commodified item.

In addition to commercial ghost hunting events, paranormal investigation teams may also offer the public the opportunity to join them on a ghost hunt. These teams often distance themselves from the commercial and entertainment side of ghost hunting to present themselves as serious researchers. However, particularly around Halloween, some teams may charge the public between $20 and $40 to join an investigation, with proceeds going to purchasing additional research equipment or paying for travel expenses. To celebrate and recognize the heightened interest in ghost hunting, a National Ghost Hunting Day was also established on October 1, 2016.

Haunted Accommodations

It is now common for accommodation providers to capitalize on the haunted reputation engendered by folklore, the media, or the findings generated from ghost hunting groups. Indeed, the status of being the most haunted accommodation in an area is used frequently as a marketing strategy. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of this in America is the Stanley Hotel, the setting for Stephen King's *The Shining*. Inspired by the rumored haunting of the Stanley Hotel, *The Shining* novel

and subsequent film continue to attract to the hotel visitors interested in experiencing one of its resident ghosts. The hotel actively promotes its haunted reputation, and claims its haunted rooms are "among our most-requested rooms, [so] availability is limited" (Stanley Hotel, 2017). The hotel also offers guests the opportunity to take part in paid theatrical séances ($20), paranormal investigations ($55) and evening ghost tours ($25) (Saladino 2015). Other examples of accommodations capitalizing on their alleged hauntings include the Golden Fleece Inn in York, England, which actively promotes itself as "York's Most Haunted pub," (Haunted Rooms, n.d.) and the 1886 Crescent Hotel and Spa in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, which markets itself as "America's Most Haunted Hotel." (America's Most Haunted Hotel 2012). Websites and guides such as http://hauntedrooms.com and the *Telegraph's* "The World's Most Haunted Hotels" (2017) guide also exist to help visitors find haunted accommodations. In these instances, ghosts are seen by accommodation providers as enhancing their desirability, while offering distinction in a competitive market (Mathe- Soulek, Aguirre, and Dallinger 2016). Rather than deter guests, as Frances Kermeen discusses in his reflection on buying a haunted inn, "Ghosts turned out to be the greatest possible attraction" (2002: 1).

Haunted Attractions

In contrast to ghost walks that take tourists to haunted sites and tell spooky stories, other attractions allow visitors to interact with the supernatural in a museum setting. For instance, tourists can visit Lorraine and Edward Warren's Occult Museum, Zak Bagans's Haunted Museum, and John Zaffis's Museum of the Paranormal—all of which feature artifacts believed to be haunted or possessed by spirits. These objects are often sourced by the museums' curators or donated by their previous owners, and come with their own haunted stories. The museums offer visitors tours of haunted objects in addition to selling merchandise such as clothing, books, and videos related to the collections and owners. Collections such as the Travelling Museum of the Occult and Paranormal can also be booked by event organizers to "enhance your event" (paramuseum.com 2017), providing guests with the opportunity to hold and interact with notorious haunted objects.

Films such as *The Conjuring* (2013), *Annabelle* (2014), and *The Possession* (2012) and television

shows like *Haunted Collector* (2011-2013) and *Deadly Possessions* (2016-present), have further stoked interest in haunted objects. These shows elevate some objects to celebrity status, making the ability to see them in person an event akin to meeting the stars of these shows. To capitalize on this public interest, Zak Bagans—host of *Ghost Adventures*—has opened a Haunted Museum in Las Vegas. This museum houses some of the most renowned haunted objects popularized by film and television. Opened in 2017, the museum already generated much excitement, as expressed by one social media user who wrote, "Holy Mary Mother of God!! First Peggy the Doll now the Dybbuk Box!! Please OPEN SOON!! #RoadTrip" (Haunted Museum Twitter 2017). These collections allow visitors to experience the supernatural first-hand, to directly engage with physical artifacts that make the ghostly legends with which they are associated seem all the more real.

Haunted Places

Increasingly, cities and towns are marketing themselves as paranormal hotspots. York, England, claimed the title of Most Haunted City in the World in 2014, with over 504 recorded hauntings (BBC 2014), and Pluckley's status as the Most Haunted Village in England rests of a claimed twelve to sixteen resident ghosts in 2008 (Telegraph 2008). The most haunted status of these destinations has become a central element of their tourism strategy; rather than hiding or explaining away their haunted histories, these cities and towns advertise and promote tourist attractions related to this ghoulish lore. As discussed by Jeannie Thomas, ghost legends may play a role in presenting the dark and sometimes shameful history of locations by "amplifying historical events by using the supernatural to indicate how these events (and the institutions from which they stemmed) continue to haunt a whole city" (2015:45). Destinations such as New Orleans use ghost legends to present narratives about slavery (Thomas 2015), and Gettysburg actively promotes its haunted past as a mechanism to discuss the horrors of the battles that took place there (Thompson 2010). Thus, ghosts act as a marketing tool for destinations and also provide visitors and locals alike a means by which they can confront the horrors of such tragic events.

Self-Guided Supernatural Tours

A fairly new addition to the ghost tourism field is the concept of self-guided supernatural tours. These involve road trips or destination visits based on recommended routes that string together multiple supernatural hot spots. For instance, you can now access haunted travel guides through the America's Haunted Road Trip (America's Haunted Road Trip, n.d.) website and Roadtrippers Ghost Guides (Roadtrippers, 2017). These sites provide visitors with information and advice for the self-guided ghost hunter. The America's Haunted Road Trip website has twenty-nine books for sale, each featuring stories on haunted sites within a given city, state, or region in the United States. The books are aimed at travelers interested in exploring the supernatural, and as the back cover of one guidebook states, "[Travelers] don't need to be a professional ghosthunter to explore the scariest spots in Colorado [*sic*]" (Lamb 2016). Similarly, the Roadtrippers Ghost Guide offers free online advice for visiting haunted locations in the United States, including ghost cities, haunted graves, and haunted roads. These more formal resources are in addition to an abundance of blogs and articles that provide information on ghostly locations to visit. In essence, self-guided tours offer tourists packaged forms of legend-tripping akin to the ghost tours described above, but with the added excitement of feeling as though you are blazing your own trail in search of the supernatural.

Visitor Motivations and the Ghost Tourism Experience

It is evident that ghost tourism has been adopted as a commercial strategy by dark sites and destinations. However, to fully understand the success of ghost tourism we should also consider why visitors are motivated to spend money on such experiences. During the last ten years, I attended over twenty paid ghost hunting events as a customer; for three years I have helped host and orchestrate ghost walks and hunts. Throughout this experience, I was always struck by not only their popularity but also the broad demographics that take part in these activities. Allow me to illustrate with an ethnographic description of one such experience during a typical ghost hunt.

The day starts as it does for normal ghost hunting event. The regular trip to the supermarket to collect essentials including cookies, soft drinks to keep up through the early hours, and a late-night sandwich—everything I need to host an event at a reputedly haunted property in York, at 35 Stonegate.

The property is well-known for its haunted reputation and during the day invites visitors for a spooky audio tour, including its notorious séance room.[2] I am particularly excited about this opportunity. The building is fairly iconic in York for its ghost stories and, while I had been on the daytime audio tour, the prospect of spending the night is exciting.

I arrive at the venue in late afternoon and am met by representatives of the events company and the main host for the evening, a well-known medium. After getting to know the venue, we start setting up the tea and coffee facilities for the fifteen or so guests arriving at 7:00pm —a mix of both male and female, young and old, believers and skeptics. To start the event the host gathers everyone for an opening up and protection session: guests are asked to close their eyes and imagine a white light around them, and afterward the host invites the spirits of the house to communicate with the group. Following this ritual, the lights are turned off and we split into two groups. The group I am with heads up to the séance room while the other group continues exploring downstairs. When we are all seated around the séance table the medium continues to ask for any communication from spirits in the building, and encourages guests to speak up if they feel anything. A few people report feeling cold, sensing someone walking behind them around the table, or hearing mysterious taps and bangs. Throughout the night we spend time in each room in the property, inviting the spirits to communicate with us. Guests continue to report unusual sounds or feelings, and occasionally claim they see figures or shadows in their peripheral vision. At one point, a guest even feels like the cupboard doors that she is standing in front of open and hit her on the back. The medium confirms and substantiates these claims, offering explanations and a description of the ghost that might have caused it. Although a full apparition did not appear to the group, by the end of the event collectively we had seemingly encountered several ghosts, and the guests seemed content with that.

This experience is typical of the ghost hunting events I observed during my research. Often participants also attempt to capture evidence of ghosts using electromagnetic frequency (EMF) meters,

[2] Since my doctoral studies I have been keen to continue my involvement in paranormal events to ensure I am up to date with changes in the ghost hunting culture, and I managed to get involved with a paranormal events company that host ghost hunting evenings across the United Kingdom. It has proved to be an excellent opportunity to meet people participating in these events, and to also observe supernatural experiences taking place.

dowsing rods, audio recorders, and cameras. These activities are very much akin to the methods shown on supernatural television shows and used by paranormal investigation teams (see Chapter 4). At one event, I witnessed the host trying out a new method of spirit communication involving the group standing in a circle and holding a copper wire, with crystals hanging from it. The group was told that this helped generate energy and invite spirits into the circle. The activity was particularly immersive, and as the host asked the spirit to lift the copper wire, several of the group members' hands started to rise. Eventually, the wire was being held above the group's head as if influenced by a mysterious spiritual force.

The most striking feature of these events is the unreliability of having a ghostly encounter. As David Inglis and Mary Holmes (2003) observe, ghosts rarely appear on cue, and thus ghost hunts arguably sell an experience to visitors that cannot be guaranteed. Other forms of tourism, such as whale watching, also offer participants the possibility—but not the promise—of seeing something extraordinary. What makes ghost hunting different from these forms of sightseeing is that the ontological status of whales and other similar creatures is not in question. In contrast, ghost hunt participants must will themselves into believing in the very thing they are supposedly hunting despite being very unlikely to have an experience that confirms (in their minds, at least) the existence of ghosts. Nevertheless, I regularly saw repeat visitors on ghost hunts. Many guests are content with simply experiencing the exciting potential for something uncanny to occur, while others infer from cold spots or unexplained noises that they have indeed been in the presence of spirits.

Although a ghostly experience is not guaranteed, visitors mention several reasons for their interest in such events. During my research I interviewed those participating in and hosting ghost hunting events and walks, their reflections on why individuals participate in such events are discussed below.

Many appreciate the opportunity to pay for an experience that lasts a short time but allows them to explore issues of spiritual significance. Ghost hunting events provide an environment to explore unconventional belief systems, particularly for those who feel disillusioned by traditional

religious institutions and practices. As one interviewee who had been on numerous ghost hunts stated, "A lot of people are trying to find some sort of meaning to life and perhaps aren't seeing that or don't any longer follow conventional religion, and therefore are looking for explanations in a different context." These spiritual motivations parallel Marc Eaton's (2015) findings in which he recognizes the rise of a spiritual "quest culture" (390) and the increase in individuals who associate themselves as "spiritual but not religious" (390). Similar to the paranormal investigation groups that Eaton investigates, paid ghost hunting events present the opportunity to seek spirituality in a non-conventional way with the limited commitment that paying for a structured experience requires.

Frequently guests also say that ghost hunting events and walks give them a chance to consider deep moral questions. Ghost stories often present listeners with an opportunity to learn from their inherent moral lessons. One interviewee, Anna says, "There's those traditional ghost stories that you get everywhere; every country's got one. It's a morality tale. It's the murdered bride on her wedding day coming back to point the finger of blame at her husband, that sort of thing." James also reinforces the same moral sentiment: "[Ghost] stories are reminders about how to live now rather than leave things unsaid or undone." Thus, ghost hunts and walks provide tourists an opportunity to reflect on their moral identities by considering the stories that are told to be a reminder, Amanda says, of the "tragic aspects of humanity" and a "warning about how to live".

Taking part in ghost tourism is also considered an educational experience. These tours enable participants to connect with the past, to make "a human link to things which have happened," as James put it. Indeed, as Michelle Hanks (2011) observes, tourists will often recount historical tales they heard on ghost walks, and ghost tour guides consider the sharing of history to be an important part of their role. In this way, ghosts and their stories can act as a form of social memory (Richardson 2003) or mythico-history (Malkki 1995). As Amanda stated, ghost tours offer "another fictionalization of history, another medium of telling a story about other people, about us, our ancestors." Ironically, the dead help history come alive for those who participate in ghost tourism.

In addition, beyond the benefits of storytelling, the prospect of actually seeing a ghost affords

participants the ability to affirm deeper questions and validate prior experiences. The mixture of apprehension and anticipation felt by many visitors to ghost tourism attractions was expressed by George, who said he was "partly there to be entertained, to learn stuff" but also had "the slight thing in the back of [my] head that maybe I will see a ghost." For people like George, the potential of a ghostly encounter was simultaneously frightening and exciting, as it would be undeniable proof of some form of life after death. For others, ghost tourism offers a chance to better understand previous experiences. When asked why she attended a ghost hunt, Louise answers, "a few weird things have happened through my life...unexplained feelings, sensations, noises that sort of thing, that makes you realize that there are things that we do not understand." For Louise and others like her, ghost tourism facilitates a shared experience of spiritual exploration.

During my time observing ghost hunts and ghost walks, it became evident that the creation of a successful ghost tourism experience is not solely based on the stories told. Of particular importance is the physical environment. Dark sites are often rich with history that is seemingly imprinted on the physical environment of these locations. The cobbled streets, ancient buildings, and winding paths of cities such as York or Edinburgh add potency to the ghostly tales told by tour guides. As one guide interviewed in York said:

> Literally, ghost walks are not about driving from one battlefield many miles away to the other, but it is actually to walk in these historic surroundings and I think this adds to the sensory advantages of the city that you've got people that are in the dark, walking around, touching and feeling the atmosphere, listening with their other senses to the stories or in some cases the truth of what is being told.

The historic setting of ghost tourism lends an air of authenticity to the accounts retold by guides. The notion that a ghost might haunt a battlefield or look for its head at the site of a former guillotine is believable to many because these stories of violence and death align with our cultural constructions of why a location may be haunted. Likewise, claims that a ghost haunts a building with a dark history, such as Peterhead Prison, feel genuine for the same reason. Visitors to such locations

often comment on features such as creaky floorboards, old furniture, and the original use of rooms still being apparent as indicators of a genuine ghostly location.[3]

During the ghost hunts and tours that I attended, the physical atmosphere of a place was frequently drawn on to reinforce its ghostly potential. The séance room that I previously mentioned is considered, due in part to the feeling engendered by the props in the room, the most supernaturally active at the location. These props include a crystal ball placed in the center of the table, Ouija boards scattered around the room, and red velvet curtains that engulf the room in darkness when drawn. Along with the stories told about the location, the presence of these occult-oriented objects in the séance room primed visitors to read supernatural causation into potentially natural phenomena like a cold breeze or creaking floor. Moreover, by adding to the perception that a place is haunted these props also validate the historical importance of supposedly haunted locations (Inglis and Holmes 2003). As Sarah told me at a ghost hunting event, "My belief is that all old buildings hold history, including paranormal history. I don't think there would be many old buildings in York that don't have a ghost or two, whether that's recorded in their walls or drifting spirits."

In addition to the physical environment, the qualities of the guides and hosts of ghost tourism attractions are also an important factor in creating a successful experience. During the ghost walks and hunts I experienced, the hosts or guides are always present and adopt a prominent leadership role. They create a spooky atmosphere that facilitates sensory experiences of the supernatural through storytelling and costuming. Guides wear clothing appropriate to the era they are representing (frequently Victorian) and often carry props such as lanterns or walking sticks. Others carry photos containing orbs and wispy images that had been sent in by previous guests on the tours. The guides use these props to authenticate their stories and set the scene for a potential experience. Of the guides and hosts that I met, all were aware of the impact that their performance had on the experience and understood that they needed to appear genuine in their role. As reported by Thompson (2010), ghost walk guides position themselves as genuinely interested in the possibility of ghosts while presenting stories that

[3] There is also often a temporal dimension to ghost hunts, which are regularly scheduled at night because this is when we expect ghostly activity to occur.

edged on humor. In doing so, they adopt a liminal position of both entertainer and supernatural enthusiast.

Alternatively, some hosts adopt a more serious role, presenting themselves as knowledgeable about the supernatural and, in the case of mediums, able to communicate with the spirit world. Performances taking this tack often include a demonstration of investigative equipment or a walk-around with mediums who demonstrate their clairvoyant abilities. Hosts encourage guests to open up their senses to the environment around them and, as one host said, occasionally lead guests into a "light hypnosis." The majority of events that I attended involved guests taking part in a protection ritual at the start of the evening in which they would be taken through a visual meditation, often involving the visualization of a white light surrounding their bodies (for a similar practice among paranormal investigators, see Eaton 2015).

The mindset induced by a genuinely ghostly atmosphere and performance enables visitors to entertain the possibility that they may encounter the supernatural. By providing an environment in which disbelief is suspended, hosts and guides encourage visitors to immerse themselves in the legend trip and explore the "extraordinary possibility of place" (Holloway 2010:628). My research made it apparent that darker legends increase the anticipation of this possibility and make sites with dark histories the biggest draws for ghost tourists. Sites associated with demonic hauntings or witchcraft are especially popular. For many years, the Ancient Ram Inn in Gloucestershire, England, hosted sold out ghost hunting events after popular media reported that evidence of devil worship and the presence of a demonic force had been discovered at the inn. Likewise, sites such as the Hellfire Caves (England), Rolling Hills Asylum (United States), and the Edinburgh Vaults (Scotland) are popular ghost hunting venues because of their darker past. Even my visit to Peterhead Prison was enhanced by the darkness and mystery associated with the prison's history. For me and other ghost tourists, the dark—even evil—nature of these stories heightens the excitement as well as the perceived authenticity of alleged hauntings.

Conclusions

Legend tripping is a common activity that has traditionally been characterized by adolescent exploration of supernatural folklore for the purpose of testing the legends' credibility and demonstrating the adolescent's bravery in the face of supernatural danger. For others, legend-tripping may entail more nefarious motives, as they seek to vandalize and desecrate places associated with these stories. Recently, legend tripping has been commercialized, perhaps most notably in the form of ghost tourism. For businesses and sometimes entire cities, local ghostly legends offer an opportunity to differentiate themselves in the market, while also providing visitors with an opportunity to engage with these dark histories in ways that are exciting, experiential, and educational. For those participating in ghost hunts and tours, these activities are a unique way to explore issues of mortality, spirituality, and morality. Ghosts and their legends allow us to confront complex and potentially troubling questions about life and death. In a society so preoccupied with hiding the reality of death from public view, ghosts and dark places are a means by which we can engage with this reality as though witnessing it through a veil. In ghost tourism, death is right before our eyes and yet somehow just beyond our grasp.

Biographical Note

Dr Rachael Ironside is a lecturer within the School of Creative and Cultural Business at Robert Gordon University, UK. She completed her PhD at the University of York in 2016 where she studied social interaction and paranormal experiences. Her doctoral research was informed by video and ethnographic data collected during her participation in paranormal investigation groups over a five-year period. More specifically the research focused on how collective experiences are understood and categorized as uncanny. Her research interests fall into two areas; the study of social interaction and paranormal events, and the role of ghost tourism in contemporary society. In respect of her interests in ghost tourism she is currently involved in research projects that examine the role of dark histories and heritage on the Isle of Orkney, and the value of ghost tourism to Scottish heritage sites.

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