

**GHOST HUNTING
WITH PETER UNDERWOOD**

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**GHOST HUNTING
WITH PETER
UNDERWOOD
IN HAUNTED HOUSES
WITH HAUNTED GARDENS**

by

PETER UNDERWOOD

President of The Ghost Club Society
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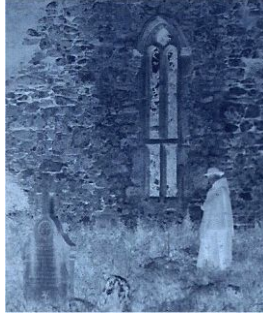
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This book is for my friend TOM BROWN of WESTON, who accompanied me on my very first visit to a haunted house – more years ago than either he or I care to remember.

And for MARLENA, whose friendship knows no bounds,
and whose love is with me always

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INTRODUCTION

One lovely summer day I walked into my garden and on to the sun-soaked lawn where my last beautiful dog sleeps her last sleep; where relatives and friends celebrated my eightieth birthday; where so many pleasant hours have been spent on summer days amid parasoled tables and garden chairs – and the thought occurred to me that here there must be remnants of moments long past, that something of all the happenings here might be preserved forever, and I thought about some of the gardens that I had been told were haunted: ghostly gardens if you like.

As I began to explore the possibility I was overwhelmed with fascinating material from many of my friends and other people who all told me their haunted homes had indeed haunted gardens and they invited me to visit. I heard footsteps that had been reported by disturbed visitors and other sounds in rooms where varied phenomena had been experienced, so that we had ‘the ghost room’ or ‘the haunted room’, while in the gardens bordering these

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haunted places I was introduced to dozens of beautiful – and haunted – gardens.

In this volume I have looked at thirty-three haunted houses with haunted gardens, mostly in England, it is true, but one in America and one in Australia, just by way of variety. They are selected, among other reasons, for divergence, distinction, singularity, difference and personal experience. Many many more could have been included from many parts of the world, and I haven't even mentioned Wales or Scotland!

In the places I visited I found good evidence for ghostly presences in dark and draughty corridors and for 'grey ladies' and other forms associated with the house, on sweeping lawns and well-manicured borders and delightful gardens: the open spaces around the house itself. I found spectral priests, monks, nuns and lesser mortals wandering along many a fragrant garden path.

On one visit to Sissinghurst I noticed a dark-robed figure some distance away but when I looked again there was no sign of him. Did I glimpse the famous phantom priest 'who met his end at Sissinghurst long, long ago' pondering on his dreadful past or thinking about Bloody John Baker whose many sins included the torture and burning of heretics? Or could it have been a human visitor to those wonderful gardens? I have often wondered. With ghosts you must always expect the unexpected.

At any and all of the places visited in this book you may encounter a ghostly presence at any time, day or night, alone or accompanied, busy and alert or relaxed and resting. Any time in any circumstances, it seems, it is possible to encounter the unknown, the unexpected or perhaps the paranormal. Encounter or imagine? But Einstein said, 'Imagination is more important than knowledge' and Francis Bacon opined, 'Facts often appear incredible only because we are ill-informed; and they cease to appear marvellous when our knowledge is extended.'

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So what are ghosts? Ask a dozen people – even psychological researchers and parapsychologists – and you will get a dozen different answers: spirits of the departed; an emotional memory; an electromagnetic organism encased in an outer layer; an extension of your imagination; a quirk of the brain; imagination – pure and simple; a photographic image on the atmosphere; a thought-form; an echo from the past that relies on atmospheric conditions; a psychic recording – perhaps a combination of all of these – or something completely different. What we can confidently say is that we do not know what a ghost is. But that there are such things is beyond reasonable doubt.

Anyone who cares to look closely will find a rich seam of apparently paranormal activity – recorded from every civilization since the beginning of recorded history – in most if not in all of the wonderful houses and beautiful gardens that are to be found everywhere throughout the world. A form of energy, perhaps, that we have yet to explain. It has been said that in life everything thrives on energy and energy cannot be destroyed, only converted into some other form. Is that what happens when we die?

‘All houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses. Through the open doors the harmless phantoms on their errands glide, with feet that make no sound upon the floor,’ said Longfellow. And the gardens which see so much of our life, love and energy are haunted too. How true was Kipling, as he was in many things, when he wrote, ‘the glory of the garden lives in more than meets the eye’.

There is a perennial interest in haunted houses. The evidence that some houses are haunted seems overwhelming but often the evidence is anecdotal and lacking in substance. There are legendary haunted properties where the evidence of any supernatural event is lost in antiquity, yet the allure still lingers, even centuries after reported happenings. Conversely there are current allegedly haunted houses, and such stories are always news.

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For years I followed up such reports and perhaps one in forty had any relation to what had actually happened, and perhaps one in seventy or eighty appeared to be genuine psychic activity. But it was the fact that a percentage, albeit a tiny percentage, of reported hauntings turned out to be worthy of serious consideration that continued to whet my interest; and I have no hesitation in stating that I have discovered sufficient good evidence from people with healthy minds in healthy bodies to sustain my interest and involvement in such matters for many many years.

In this volume I present a variety of haunted houses and ghostly gardens, for it is only recently that I have established that many haunted houses have haunted gardens, acknowledging that anomalous experience is not confined to the four walls of a building but that such experiences often extend out into the landscape.

There are instances of historical hauntings in the present volume – Blickling Hall, Littlecote and Sawston Hall among them – although I hope I have something new to say about each and some recent evidence for the hauntings. However the majority of the apparently paranormal happenings examined and discussed here are hitherto unexplored instances of houses and gardens being haunted.

There are those who believe that the environment – perhaps even the very walls – of some places preserve, retain and influence paranormal activity that is witnessed within the confines of a house where dramatic, tragic, sad or happy events have taken place. Now it seems such activity has sometimes escaped into the surrounding open spaces of haunted houses, resulting in haunted or ghostly gardens.

As to my qualifications for writing about ghosts and hauntings, I have to say that not only have I spent many years, well over half a century in fact, investigating such phenomena personally but also writing, lecturing and discussing the subject with such ‘experts’ (if there are experts in these ethereal subjects) as Professor Henry

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Habberley Price, Mollie Goldney, Dr Eric Dingwall, Professor C E M Joad, W H Salter, Elliott O'Donnell, Guy Lyon Playfair, Lord Dowding, Sir Alister Hardy, Tony Cornell, Sir Julian Huxley and a score of other people who all spoke from personal experience. My fifty published books have, I believe, reflected some of the ghosts and ghostly happenings that I have encountered.

There are many misconceptions regarding ghosts. During the course of a live television programme from Madrid, the representative from Italy stated that the only people who claimed to see ghosts were those who believed in ghosts. I immediately retaliated by saying that in fact the opposite is true: the vast majority of people who claim to see ghosts have previously dismissed them as figments of the imagination – until they see one themselves. Another misconception is that ghosts are never seen in daylight, never by more than one person at a time – or perhaps by two people, suggesting that telepathy may play a part – but most commonly by one person only.

In reality there are many exceptions. One is the reported ghost, an anciently attired phantom, seen by literally hundreds of people in broad daylight in Ripon, Yorkshire, and reported in the *Chichester Observer* on the occasion of the re-opening of the thirteenth-century Wakeman's House. The figure, in strange period costume, was seen by the large crowd gathered to watch, seemingly standing in one of the deserted rooms. It was established that no one could have been inside the house at the time and descriptions taken from various members of the vast audience tallied. As the report stated: 'Some doubt might arise if only one person had seen the figure, but when hundreds saw it simultaneously and when many descriptions fitted perfectly – well, it makes one think, doesn't it?' Afterwards a local historian discovered a painting of the first wakeman to live in the house, one Hugh Ripley, and every detail of the description of the figure seen corresponded.

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Yet there are still people who believe that ghosts are figments of the imagination and have no reality outside the mind of the person purporting to see the figure. There is a very simple test that should be more widely known. When seeing what they think may be a ghost the watcher should distort his vision by pressing underneath one eye. If the figure remains perfect, it is indeed the product of his mind and has no objectivity, but if what he sees is distorted, what he is seeing is indeed objective and has nothing to do with the mind of the observer.

However, the unreliability of the human eye must always be considered. Look for example at the following sketch. Look intently at the three white dots in the centre of the drawing for ninety seconds, then look at a large plain surface such as a ceiling or wall. The picture will appear in reverse. The illusion is due to the fact that the image of any object seen by the eye remains on the retina for a short while before fading.



How do we know there are not natural circumstances that cause the same effect? Seeing a ghost may sometimes be due to a

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reversal of the process of ordinary vision, which can happen in certain circumstances. In normal vision light from an object falls on to the sensitive screen of the eye, the retina, and makes an image there. This image is then converted into nervous signals which pass along the optic nerve to the back of the brain, where they combine to form the picture seen. What could happen if this process back-fired? An imaginary picture in the brain would be broken down into nervous signals which would run forwards to the eye and make an image on the retina. If this image then surged back to the brain to make a mental picture there in the normal way, there would be no means of knowing whether the resulting picture was real or unreal. Perhaps the only type of ghost that this theory would not account for is where the same ghost is seen by two or more people at the same time; but then telepathy, the universal aunt of psychical research, might provide an answer!

This volume contains convincing evidence of the same ghost or a very similar one being seen by more than one person at the same time, and such a ghost being seen at different times by different people who had no knowledge of any previous sightings, in both haunted houses and in ghostly gardens. We have yet to come up with a convincing and compelling theory that explains all responsibly reported and verifiable apparitions.

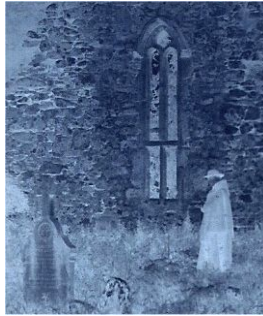
After visiting some of these places and being fortunate enough to encounter an entity not of this world, perhaps you can produce such a theory, for it is of supreme importance that we explore every possible natural cause for the thousands of ghosts seen over the years before we resort, if all else fails, to the paranormal: that which is beyond a normal or scientific explanation.

‘While one may be sceptical about an individual instance,’ said Emmanuel Kant the philosopher (1724-1804), ‘the sum total presents a body of evidence that is difficult to ignore.’

- Peter Underwood

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BEAULIEU: THE ABBEY AND PALACE HOUSE, NEAR LYNDHURST, HAMPSHIRE

Behind the historic and beautiful Palace House at Beaulieu are the remains and ruins of Beaulieu Abbey, perhaps the most haunted area of this haunted place. In fact, as one of the most popular travel writers of all time, H V Morton, said, ‘There is no place known to me in which you would be more likely to see a ghost in daylight than the ruins of Beaulieu Abbey. It is a quiet place, full of ghosts.’ And so it is. Here, where there has been more than three hundred years of uninterrupted worship, devotion and prayer, it is not unreasonable to expect that something of all this heritage remains to this day.

King John – who was forced to sign Magna Carta at Runnymede in 1215 and who is generally regarded as unusually unscrupulous in an unscrupulous age – gave this part of the New Forest to French monks who founded a closed order here in 1204. Over three centuries later Henry VIII dissolved the abbey. The square gatehouse was converted into a family residence and the years passed until in the eighteenth century Beaulieu became

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through marriage the property of the Dukes of Buccleuch, with the fifth Duke giving it as a wedding present to his second son, Lord Henry Scott, grandfather of the present Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.

I have visited Beaulieu on several occasions and once took a party of Ghost Club members there. Each time Lord Montagu found time to talk with me and I have considerable admiration for this hard-working and delightful man. He told me, 'You'll find ghosts are part of the scene here.' Although he has never seen any of the ghosts himself, as far as he knows, he fully accepts that the place is haunted, especially the area of the Abbey, and he has several times experienced the strong smell of incense that so many people have reported. Once, he told me, when entertaining some guests to dinner in his dining room (which he showed me), formerly the Gatehouse Upper Chapel, a sudden and very strong smell of incense wafted through the room. Everyone was aware of it – and it was by no means an uncommon occurrence, I learned.

Among the ghosts at Beaulieu there is a man 'with a bright red face and white whiskers', seen by a Swiss parlourmaid and several visitors, and ghost monks have repeatedly been reported as have various unexplained sounds. Group Captain R. A. McMurtrie and his wife frequently heard inexplicable footsteps in a cottage they occupied in Palace Lane; also doors opened and closed by themselves and the sound of whispering, when no words are actually distinguishable, has often been reportedly heard together with other odd sounds. It transpires that previous and subsequent occupants of that house reported hearing identical sounds. There have been other ghostly happenings, as we shall see. Author Diana Norman told me that when she was visiting haunted houses with my clairvoyant friend Tom Corbett for *The Stately Ghosts of England* (1963), 'we never encountered such a mass of evidence from one stately home as we encountered at Beaulieu'.

It is the apparently ghostly happenings that we are looking for, and at Beaulieu we are not disappointed for here we can find authentic experiences involving ghostly monks, strange lights,

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celestial singing and the sound of chanting, sometimes in daylight, sometimes in the dead of night.

No monks have lived at Beaulieu since 1538 when the Abbey was dissolved but over the years there have been innumerable reports of ghost monks being seen in the area and especially in the vicinity of the Cloisters, the quadrangle in the centre of Beaulieu Abbey.

In the 1920s a single monk was repeatedly seen by residents and by casual visitors, sometimes accompanied by disembodied footsteps. At other times footsteps would be heard approaching the ancient doorways when no visual form was seen. Often loud crashing noises and loud bangs would be heard for which no cause or explanation could be discovered. These sounds were reported both during the hours of daylight and at night time.

Miss Aimée Cheshire lived for many years in a vast oak-beamed, stone-walled room within the ruins of the old dormitory and she said she often heard footsteps and the clink of keys. It was here that monks, four centuries before, used to sleep in cells, being awakened by one of their number in the small hours to welcome the new day with Matins. Sometimes Miss Cheshire, and other people who stayed there, would hear the sound of a choir singing. This might happen at any hour of the day or night but always, it seemed, when it was least expected. On one occasion two friends came to dinner with Miss Cheshire and they were very sceptical of the sounds of monks that she told them she had heard many times. In the middle of the meal a gentle sound pervaded the whole room – the sound of monks chanting – and all three ladies heard it at the same time. No sooner were they fully aware of the sound than it ceased.

The Revd. Robert Frazer Powles died after spending no fewer than sixty years as curate and vicar at Beaulieu and to him the ghost monks were for years as genuine and natural as any mortal, so real and so much a part of his daily life that he quietly accepted

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their presence and whenever he spoke of them, which was seldom, he did so with reverence and complete conviction.

During the Second World War a sighting of the ghost monks was reported from an unexpected quarter. At the time a small anti-aircraft detachment was posted at nearby Buckler's Hard and one afternoon a couple of officers were driving past the Abbey when they both saw a small group of monks in the Abbey grounds. When they next saw the vicar who acted as their chaplain, they asked him which order the monks belonged to. The vicar told them that the Beaulieu monks had been Cistercians but there had been no monks at the abbey since 1538. He and the puzzled officers ascertained that no real monks had visited Beaulieu on the day that they had clearly seen the figures.

A retired nurse, Mrs Samuels, who occupied a flat in the Domus Conversorum, walked out on to a little stone landing at the top of her staircase one Sunday morning and saw, seated in a recess beside a magnolia tree, the figure of a monk reading a scroll. She watched him for a few minutes and then returned indoors to make herself a cup of tea. When she returned the monk had completely vanished. Enquiries revealed that no monk was in the vicinity at the time.

I talked with Mr Henry Widnell, a mine of information on Beaulieu who lived in Beaulieu village, and he told me about what he called 'a curious echo from the past' that had always puzzled him. It concerned a lady whom Widnell knew well for many years and who lived at the time in one of the old Beaulieu houses, through which the precinct sanctuary wall runs.

This lady had a curiously vivid dream – or possibly a vision, she was never sure herself – in which a man came into the hall one evening and when she asked him what he wanted, he told her that he had killed a man in the wood, had cut off the head and the right hand, and, as it was mutilated, had buried everything outside the precinct wall, and now he wanted it all buried in sanctified ground. He intimated that digging at a spot he specified would reveal the

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human remains and also two stones, one of which she was to ‘give to the Abbot’ and the other she was to keep for herself. Here there is some variation in the story, one version stating that digging was duly carried out and the bones recovered and reburied together with the two stones that were also found, as foretold. But Widnell always maintained that a concrete floor was laid where the bones were supposed to be buried and no digging in fact took place. What did happen was that noises – footfalls, bangs and crashing sounds – and the reappearance of the phantom man so troubled the lady concerned that she consulted my informant who happened to know Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, then living at nearby Lyndhurst. Doyle had a great interest in such matters and the outcome was that Sir Arthur and Lady Conan Doyle, another couple, the lady and Widnell all met and held a séance in the drawing room on the sanctuary side of the precinct wall.

I relate the rest of the story in Henry Widnell’s own words: ‘Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who was the most reverent of men, as well as the most earnest in such matters, began with a prayer and then enquired if there was a spirit which haunted the house, at which the table spelt out “yes”. Sir Arthur asked next whether the spirit was troubled or earthbound and wished to be freed? In each case the answer was in the affirmative. Sir Arthur then requested the spirit to tell his former name, whereat the unusual name of “de Ceigunal” was spelt out. After this Sir Arthur addressed the spirit, commanding it not to be troubled any more and to depart in peace. As to whether the spirit was actually contacted by Sir Arthur and his circle, there are others better able to judge than the writer. It can, however, be affirmed in the most definite manner possible, that the proceedings were conducted from beginning to end with the utmost seriousness and gravity. Undoubtedly too the footsteps and noises began to decrease.’

I may say that Widnell was always somewhat strangely reluctant to talk about the ghosts of Beaulieu although he wrote about them in his contributions to books about the area. I remember I asked Widnell whether he would like to address the

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Ghost Club on the subject and I quote his reply from Abbeymead, Beaulieu, the last time I heard from him:

‘You have paid me a very kind compliment and one which I much appreciate. I am afraid however that I cannot accept your invitation to give a talk for two reasons: firstly, I shall not be in London on 1st January, and secondly, I am reluctant to talk on these “matters” too freely. I have a strong feeling that my “subjects” think that I am rather exploiting them and object accordingly. I was hesitant to write what I did but was especially asked to do so, and my reluctance increased after I had agreed to the request. I am sure that as one keenly interested in these “affairs” you will understand my feelings. With again many thanks for having been so kind as to ask me ...’

Colonel Robert Gore-Browne lived in an isolated house on the Beaulieu estate and he saw a ghost monk one evening at dusk as he was walking his dog along the lane that passed his house. Some way ahead and walking towards him, he saw a figure in brown with the skirt of its attire brushing the ground. At first he thought it was a woman and he prepared to have a word with whoever it might be. His path lay down a small dip and then up again, but when he reached the brow of the little hill there was nobody in sight. He looked carefully on either side of the path but there was no trace of the figure he had seen. The dog showed no sign of being aware of anything unusual. ‘It may have been a ghost,’ the Colonel said afterwards. ‘It may not – but some funny things do go on around here ... that’s for certain.’

Once when I was at Beaulieu I talked with Michael Sedgwick, curator of the magnificent Montagu Motor Museum, who lived in a cottage on the east side of the Abbey Church. He told me that he had twice heard the unexplained sound of chanting. The first time was just before Christmas time when he was particularly busy and had been working very late, typing and chain-smoking as he did so. At length he decided to open the window and let some clean air into the room before he went to bed. As he opened the window he

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heard distinct and definite chanting. It was very beautiful but came in uneven waves, not unlike a faulty radio. For a moment it would be quite loud and then suddenly it would fade away almost completely and then return again, loud and clear.

The second time Michael had heard the chanting he had again been up very late working and he heard the same sounds, again fading and then coming back, several times, as he opened the window. On each occasion he had noticed that it had been a still, crisp, clear night.

One of Beaulieu's catering manageresses told me she heard similar sounds late one night just before another Christmas. It sounded to her almost like a service being held in the church – beautiful singing, 'something to be remembered for always'.

On the north-east side of the church there is a plat of ground which is believed to have been the place where the monks buried their dead. Here, especially at night, slow and ponderous footsteps have been heard, as though something heavy is being carried. It is possible to watch the progress of the noise as it moves – and it even sounds different when it crosses a bridge over a stream, I am told by those who have heard it. The series of sounds ends with a thump and the sound of earth being shovelled, but nothing is visible.

Several years ago I received yet another report of strange happenings at Beaulieu. This one came from Paul Sangster of Bognor Regis and detailed a night he and two friends spent at haunted Beaulieu.

The night, he tells me, was clear and cold – although it was August – with a rising moon. The party took up their positions on the east side of the Cloisters at 8.58 p.m. and all was quiet and there was nothing to report until 12.15 a.m. The watchers took turns for one of their party to rest for an hour every three hours. At exactly 2.15 a.m. the two on watch saw seven points of light moving from north to south across the centre of the Cloisters. A

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photograph was immediately taken and this shows quite clearly two groups of three lights followed by a single one. It has been suggested that the monks could have been holding a Mass at this time and were on their way there. Dawn broke at 4.30 a.m. At 5.03 a.m. the two watchers on duty saw a shadowy figure in the area of the gateway to the lane on the west side of the Cloisters, directly facing them. This figure appeared to turn towards the north or his left, and then back towards the watchers before turning the same way again; then with its back towards the watchers it appeared to take two or three steps before fading from sight. On immediately walking over to the spot where the figure had disappeared the investigators discovered that the temperature there was ten degrees colder than on the other side of the Cloisters. The whole sighting of the monk – if monk it was – lasted, I am told, ‘a good five minutes’ but the photographs taken with and without flash on two cameras revealed no figure.

Do the monks of Beaulieu still walk? It would seem that there is evidence to suggest that they do but, as Lord Montagu said to me, ‘The ghosts here have never been evil; in fact I don’t think they have ever been anything but extremely friendly, but they have been seen and heard by countless people.’

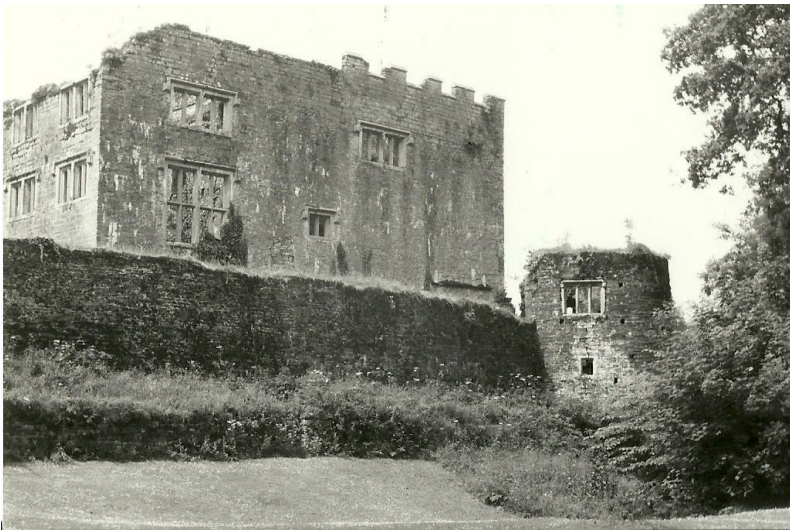
During the last war Palace House was headquarters of the local Air Raid Precautions and of the Red Cross Association. Ten other houses on the estate were used for training members of the Special Operations Executive, controlled by the British Secret Service, before they were smuggled into occupied countries. Odette Churchill was one of them and a plaque has been erected in honour of S.O.E. members in the ruins of the Abbey Cloisters. It seems likely that these brave people would have experienced their last intense feelings of privacy and peace in these surroundings and not a few visitors have recently reported encountering lone figures in the vicinity – not monks but people of both sexes dressed in relatively modern but outdated clothes – walking quickly in the gardens of Beaulieu – figures that unaccountably disappear.

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Beaulieu: the haunted cloisters. (Photo: Lord Montagu of Beaulieu)

Berry Pomeroy: part of the haunted ruins, where Robert Graves encountered "something" that terrified him in the garden. (And he was not the only one!)



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Berry Pomeroy: a simulated ghost. A postcard that was sold for many years at the castle (Photo: Cox)