

WHEN THE LIGHTS

In 1979, Colin Wilson travelled to Yorkshire to interview a family who had suffered a series of increasingly violent and disturbing phenomena in their average semi-detached house on a Pontefract estate. The entity behind the outbreak became known as ‘the Black Monk of Pontefract’ and as a new British film retells the story ALAN MURDIE looks back at one of the most remarkable poltergeist cases on record.

One of the most remarkable British poltergeists of the 20th century was the ‘Black Monk of Pontefract’, which invaded a semi-detached house at 30 East Drive, on the Chequerfield Estate in Pontefract, Yorkshire between 1966–68. The bizarre manifestations were spread over three years, disrupting the lives of the residents, Jean and Joan Pritchard and their two children, 15-year-old Philip and 12-year-old Diane. Going beyond noises and the simple movement of objects, the case featured the appearance of a hooded figure, which some believed to be the ghost of a monk from the local priory who had been executed for rape in the Middle Ages. Whatever its origins, this poltergeist remains one of the most peculiar cases on record, with the manifestations and their impact on the lives of the Pritchard family being investigated by Colin Wilson and detailed in his 1981 book *Poltergeist!* and now retold in a new British film called *When the Lights Went Out*.

Colin Wilson was originally alerted to the case in 1979 by local historian Tom Cuniff, who had found reports of the story while researching the history of the Cluniac priory in Pontefract. The story was so extraordinary that Wilson travelled up to Yorkshire in 1980 to investigate further, visiting the house and interviewing members of the Pritchard family and their neighbours. Listening to their accounts, along with tape recordings of banging noises made at the time, not only convinced Wilson the case was genuine but led him to change his mind about the nature of the forces behind poltergeist manifestations.

“At that time, I believed poltergeists were somehow caused by the unconscious minds of emotionally disturbed teenagers... It was while the girl, Diane,

PUDDLES OF WATER BEGAN FORMING ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR

was describing to me how she had been dragged upstairs by the throat by some invisible force, which left black bruises on her throat, that I realised this was not her unconscious mind. This was a ‘Spirit’.”¹

It is easy to see why Wilson formed this opinion when the facts of the haunting are considered.

The first wave

The first signs of the poltergeist outbreak began in August 1966, when the Pritchards went away on a family holiday but left behind 15-year-old Philip with his grandmother, Mrs Sarah Scholes, at 30 East Drive.² The Pritchards had no reason to believe there would be any problems; their property was an ordinary council house with no previous history of hauntings.

However, this rapidly changed when both Philip and his grandmother experienced cold gusts of wind blowing through the house and shaking doors and windows despite its being warm and sunny outside. Shortly afterwards, a mysterious white powder began falling from the air in the lounge. Initially, neither Philip nor his grandmother jumped to the conclusion that there was a ghost in the house; but the puzzled Mrs Scholes called over her daughter, Marie Kelly, who lived nearby with her husband Vic. Soon after

Mrs Kelly arrived, puddles of water began inexplicably appearing on the kitchen floor, and a greenish foam began emerging from taps.

The Water Board could find no explanation after checking the floors and drains. Then, in the evening, physical disturbances began in the house, with tea being sprinkled in the kitchen, a plant being uprooted from a pot and thrown downstairs, crockery in a cabinet vibrating and loud banging sounds. After checking neighbours were not creating the noises, Mrs Scholes called back Marie Kelly, whereupon the house became calm. Philip retired to bed, but when his grandmother looked in to say goodnight both were alarmed by the wardrobe moving by itself. They fled across the road to Marie and Vic’s house for the night.

Meanwhile, the police came to examine the house, but found nothing untoward. Marie then called on a local ghost hunter named Mr O’Donald, who came at once to inspect the property. He gave his opinion that teenagers such as Philip could be the focus of poltergeist activity, and in passing remarked to Vic and Marie that poltergeists often damaged photographs (the origin of this claim is obscure). They waited in the house until 1.45am but nothing seemed to be happening. Mr O’Donald left, but as Vic and Mary locked up they heard a crash. A wedding photograph had been slashed and thrown. This occurred when Philip – who Mr O’Donald had identified as the likely focus – was absent from the property.

On returning home from their holiday the following Saturday, the Pritchards were understandably astonished by the tales of what had been happening in their absence. On enquiring what the noises were like, they were suddenly treated to an example – three loud and

HITS WENT OUT





ABOVE: The semi-detached home of the Pritchard family at 30 East Drive, Pontefract, as it appears today. BELOW: Mrs Pritchard outside the house in 1981.

unexplained bangs echoed through the house, followed by a cold draught which rattled the windows. Those three knocks signified the departure of the poltergeist for two years.

Mr Nobody

In August 1968, as the second anniversary of the outbreak approached, the phenomena resumed. Philip had left school and was working, and his sister Diane, now a pretty 15-year-old, seemed to become the focus of

the phenomena, which soon dramatically eclipsed the first wave of two years before in both force and variety. The hammering and banging sounds returned on a nightly basis, accompanied by the lights being turned off and the movement and destruction of objects.

A Church of England priest, Rev. Davy, visited the house. After witnessing a candlestick fall from a mantle piece, he initially declared that such object movements were being caused by subsidence.

He was hastily forced to revise his opinion when a second candlestick slowly floated from the shelf and dropped to the floor in front of him. This was followed by an enormous crashing sound and all the crockery from the dresser being dumped on the floor. Amazingly, not a single piece was broken. Now convinced that evil forces were at work, Rev. Davy's only advice was for the family to move.

Nonetheless, with commendable fortitude, the Pritchards stayed in their home as the manifestations developed in power and variety. The contents of bedrooms were thrown around as though raided by invisible burglars. A grandmother clock was thrown downstairs and smashed – seemingly prompted by a visit of the mayoress of Pontefract who casually remarked that the clock had remained untouched. As with the broken photo, it was as if something was acting on things that it had overheard.

Vic Kelly's sister Rene Holden – who had a reputation for being “a bit psychic” – was a witness to many of the phenomena, but her suggestion that they attempt to communicate with the presence at East Drive resulted only in further destructive displays rather than any insight into its motivation.

On occasion, pieces of furniture levitated, with one heavy item and a sewing machine pinning Diane down against the stairs. Fortunately, she was not physically hurt. Although the force used by the poltergeist was considerable, it did not seem to wish to physically harm anyone in the house, only to frighten and alarm.

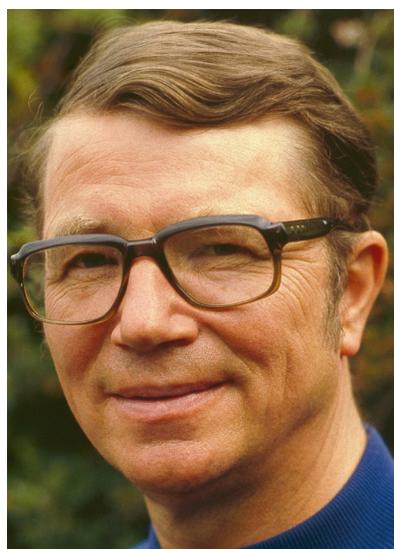
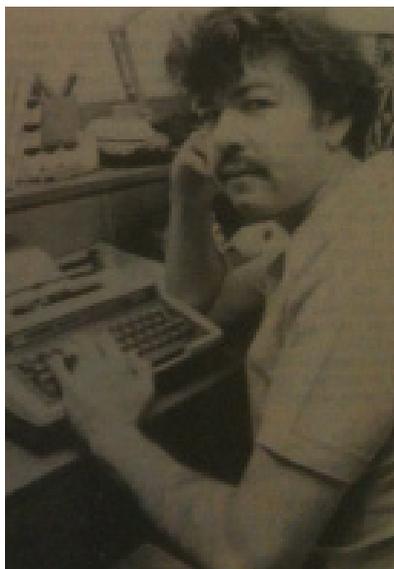
Wilson describes in *Poltergeist!* how the presence showed a bizarre attraction towards food, throwing eggs (which seemed to pass through solid obstacles



and barriers) and one occasion leaving what resembled bite marks in a sandwich (which Mrs Holden tried unsuccessfully to preserve as a memento). More juvenile were antics such as emptying out the fridge and casting out a string of sausages. This occurred in the presence of another relative, Mrs Maude Peerce, a stalwart of the Salvation Army, who had a jug of milk poured over her. She accused the Pritchard children of playing tricks. However, she too was forced to revise this opinion when the poltergeist performed one of its most incredible manifestations – using her own fur gloves to improvise the appearance of a pair hands from behind a partly opened door.

The gloves appeared widely separated, one moving around the top of the door frame, and the other around the bottom. The wide separation of the gloves gave the horrifying impression of a pair of hands belonging to a giant being lurking behind the door. Mrs Peerce shouted “Get away! You’re evil!” and threw a boot at the door. The gloves vanished only to reappear floating in the air before them, with one appearing first to beckon to the terrified onlookers, and then making a menacing fist. At this Mrs Peerce burst into a chorus of the hymn “Onward Christian Soldiers” to repel the entity. The gloves then began moving as if to conduct her singing, beating time to the tune. The absurdity of this effect at least temporarily relieved the tension of the family, who became more amused than frightened by this performance. Mrs Peerce was not amused, and after the gloves were recovered she burned them, believing they were tainted with evil. Later the poltergeist made a white coat disappear and it was found months later in lying under the coal in the coal shed – yet completely clean.

A Catholic priest attempted what appears to have been a rather half-hearted exorcism; the result was more noises and



TOP: Local historian Tom Cunliff, who first researched the case. ABOVE: Colin Wilson.

damage to religious objects and images in the Pritchards’ house. Over Easter, inverted crosses painted in gold appeared on doors, the poltergeist apparently daubing the symbols with paint that Philip used for his bicycle.

Accounts of the haunting were picked up by the local press and the publicity brought crowds of interested and sensation-seeking individuals to camp outside in the hope of experiencing what had become almost nightly performances by the racket-making ghost. It seems many were not disappointed.³ Less impressed were members of the now defunct Doncaster Psychical Research Group who, after a perfunctory investigation, accused Philip – without any proof – of fabricating the noises; their argument was based on a clear patch amongst the dust in the loft, which they alleged had been made by a loudspeaker.

Animal and breathing sounds were added to the repertoire of noises, while the family were often too scared to investigate because of the poltergeist’s habit of switching off the lights and leaving them in darkness. Mrs Pritchard took to keeping an electric torch with her but often she found the bulb or the batteries were mysteriously removed.

The poltergeist brought one unexpected benefit when the East Dive house underwent a dramatic drop in electricity usage, resulting in lower quarterly bills. The honest Mrs Pritchard reported the unexplained drop in usage to the Electricity Board who acquitted her of any tampering. But the family suspected the poltergeist was turning back the meter.

More alarming were incidents when members of the household felt themselves pulled and thrown around by invisible hands. These responsive and interactive phenomena suggested that the presence was a distinct entity in its own right, which the Pritchards variously dubbed ‘Mr



ABOVE: Tasha Connor as Sally Maynard (the Diane Pritchard character in *When the Lights Went Out*) contemplates the dark at the top of the stairs.



ABOVE: The interior of the house at 30 East Drive as it appears today. Producer Bill Bungay found the property was for sale, and has since bought it.

Nobody' and 'Fred'. The presence focused its attention mostly on Diane, who suffered being thrown out of bed a dozen times with the mattress dumped on top of her. But her most terrifying moment came one evening when she was dragged up the stairs by an invisible force. A frantic tug-of-war began when Philip and Mrs Pritchard ran upstairs to try to rescue her. Suddenly, Diane was released and they all tumbled down the stairs in shock. When interviewed in 1980, everyone in the house confirmed Diane's terror and confusion. It was this incident that satisfied Wilson that the teenager's unconscious mind was not responsible and that a distinct entity was behind the phenomena.

Black Monk Time

A new identity for 'Mr Nobody' was suggested when a monk-like apparition began to appear. A hooded figure was seen by both Mr and Mrs Pritchard simultaneously, then again by Diane and Philip together in the kitchen. Among other witnesses was their next-door neighbour Ms May Mountain who had also experienced violent drumming noises in her rooms (cracks in her ceiling were still visible when Wilson visited her in 1980). Mrs Mountain told Wilson one morning she had felt someone standing behind her in the kitchen. Looking round, she saw a tall figure in a black monk's habit. The face within the cowl was obscured but she felt no fear, only curiosity, until the form vanished. Another witness glimpsed what appeared to be a figure in a garment like a trailing dress-gown.

It was these features of the apparition which led to the case being dubbed the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' and the suggestion made that the Pritchards were being haunted by the black-robed ghost of one of the Cluniac order from Pontefract's former mediæval priory. A local tradition a monk

ONE NIGHT, DIANE WAS DRAGGED UP THE STAIRS BY AN INVISIBLE FORCE

from Pontefract Priory had been hanged for rape in the Middle Ages and that the house stood near the site of an old gallows. This encouraged speculation that the spirit of the guilty monk was targeting Diane Pritchard, turning her into the victim of a sexual stalker from beyond the grave. However, an extensive study of historical records failed to turn up any evidence for a monk from the Priory ever being executed for a sex crime. As with so many alleged entities manifesting in haunted houses or at séances, no corroboration could be discovered for any independent existence in the historical past.

Finally, the Pritchards resorted to a tactic derived from vampire films and hung garlic in the house – clearly they had reached a point of desperation and were willing to attempt anything. Following a few more token efforts, the Black Monk seems thereafter to have abandoned its assaults permanently, although it may be that the poltergeist had simply reached the end of its natural duration.

As Wilson says of the Black Monk of Pontefract, "The strange thing is that remarkable case was never officially investigated – or even recorded – and that it came so close to being forgotten." This is not completely true: it was logged as one of some 109 hauntings occurring in the British Isles in 1968 by the Paraphysical Laboratory at Downton, Wiltshire, but no action was taken.⁴ As a

result, it was not until Wilson investigated the case that anything approaching a proper study was made of its extraordinary features.

Astonishing as the details collected by Wilson are, many of the incidents have precedents in poltergeist literature. Pools of water;⁵ three knocks marking the departure of the poltergeist;⁶ damage to religious objects;⁷ levitations of heavy furniture;⁸ the uprooting of plants;⁹ physical assaults suggesting an external entity;¹⁰ and electrical anomalies¹¹ have all featured in poltergeist cases, though rarely occurring in such dramatic combination. Even the commencement of events at the end of August is not without precedent – manifestations commenced in the Enfield poltergeist on 31 August 1977.¹²

It should be noted that the Black Monk of Pontefract is also not the only case in which monk-like apparitions have featured. The same year as the Pontefract manifestations commenced, a book was published in West Germany detailing the fantastic 19th-century story of the 'Maid of Orlach' who was believed to be possessed by spirits amid what are now recognisable as poltergeist manifestations.¹³ Rosina Magdalena Gronbach of Orlach, Wurttemberg, was a young peasant girl whose adventures began in 1831 in a cow shed where a recently bought cow was found to have been moved and the folkloric knotting of tails (usually associated with horses) began to occur.

Mysterious fires soon followed and it was not long before the girl became possessed by two spirits – a white one and a black one in the form of a monk who became visible to her. A strange voice began to manifest through the girl, with the black spirit pretending he controlled her, calling her vile names and pouring out abuse against her. When the black spirit appeared, she described it as if coming from a dark cloudy formation, and when possession took place

SHOOTING THE LIGHTS OUT

AN INTERVIEW WITH PAT HOLDEN AND BIL BUNGAY

Director **PAT HOLDEN**'s mother was one of the key witnesses to the events at 30 East Drive, Pontefract. Now, with producer **BIL BUNGAY**, Pat has brought the story of the Black Monk of Pontefract to the screen. *FT* talked to them about family history, paranormal activity and politics.

FT: How did *When The Lights Went Out* come about?

PAT HOLDEN: I've wanted to make a film about the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' ever since I was a kid. As you know, it's a very personal story for me because it involved my aunt [Jean Pritchard], whose home was the target of the haunting, and my mother [Rene Holden], who experienced it at first hand many times.

The haunting took place in a nice, average northern council house – 30 East Drive, Pontefract, to be precise – and happened to a normal, working class family. It's recognised as one of the most violent of all poltergeist hauntings. Many people experienced it at first hand – the police, neighbours, relatives, priests and even the local mayor. One thing I have never questioned about it is its authenticity. What makes it a great subject for a film is that it's about an extraordinary thing that happened to such ordinary people, in such an ordinary place. I've always found that fascinating.

BIL BUNGAY: Yes, that's it. When Pat first told me the story it wasn't just the incredible events that caught my attention, but the fact that it was a family story – his mother actually saw

these things happen on a regular basis. It must have been the subject of many a dinnertime conversation in the Holden household! Having sat and listened to Pat's stories for many hours, I vowed that one day we'd turn it into a film. I just didn't realise that it would take us the best part of 20 years to get the project off the ground.

FT: What was the inspiration for the title *When The Lights Went Out*?

BB: Even though the actual haunting lasted for years, we chose to telescope events into one year and move them to 1974 – for the simple reason that 1974 was an era of stagflation and so it's almost identical to the economic situation we are living in now. It was a time when there was political uncertainty, strikes, business closures, massive job losses. And, of course, there were power cuts every night – which for this one family in Pontefract (whose lights often went off even when there *was* power in the grid) meant having to deal with a whole lot more than finding the candles.

It's a simple story about a family's struggle against an invisible force



Pat Holden and Bil Bungay

that threatens them as a family unit. You could see it as a metaphor for the credit crunch – something that's taking away jobs and threatening livelihoods, and thus the stability of family units all over the country. 2012 is 1974 all over again. So, hopefully, *When The Lights Went Out* should feel relevant to its audience despite it being based on events that happened 40 years ago.

FT: The Pontefract poltergeist demonstrated an unusually broad range of phenomena – did you manage to get most of the things it did into the film? And how closely did you stick to the actual events?

PH: It did a lot of scary and occasionally unique things: levitating stuff, making noises, touching people, freezing rooms, turning off lights... Perhaps the scariest thing it did was drag Diane Pritchard – Sally Maynard in our film – up a flight of stairs. We got most of it into the film, along with versions of most of the real characters. Overall, I'd say we stuck fairly close to the real events, although I've had to make some changes, as you'd expect for a narrative film aimed at a wide audience.

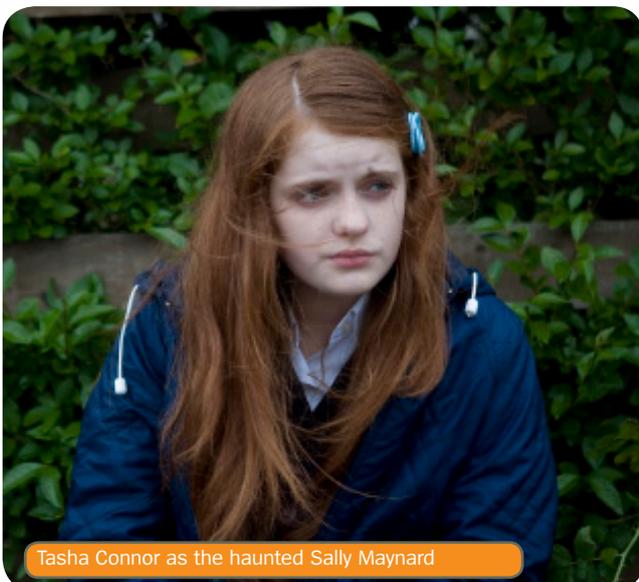
BB: The ending is the main departure from the original story. Poltergeists usually just seem to stop their activities eventually. That doesn't really make for an edge-of-your-seat climax, so we had to embellish the ending a little.

FT: It must be a bit odd having your own mother as a character in the film. Colin Wilson mentions that she was known to be "a bit psychic". What exactly does that mean?

PH: Yes, my mother is 'Rita' in the film, played brilliantly by Andrea Lowe. In real life, she did have something of a name as a local psychic and read tea leaves and cards for people. She always seemed to be uncannily accurate in what she came up with. She even contacted the police saying the Yorkshire Ripper was a lorry driver, years before they actually got Peter Sutcliffe.

FT: Did you ever visit the house with her when the poltergeist was in residence?

PH: No. I wasn't allowed anywhere near the house until it was long gone.



Tasha Connor as the haunted Sally Maynard



Len Maynard (Steven Waddington) and the priest try an exorcism

FT: Have either of you ever had a personal experience of the kind the film explores?

BB: The truth is, when Pat was telling me about the Pontefract Poltergeist all those years ago, I'm not sure I totally bought the story. However, in the course of preparing for *When The Lights Went Out*, I did quite a bit of research and also had the privilege of being invited to a house in Holbrooks, Coventry, that had an actual living, breathing, howling, banging, object-throwing, door-slaming, happy-slapping, animal-hurting beast of a poltergeist in it. I left the Coventry house that day with a very different perspective on poltergeists. Now there is absolutely no doubt to me that these things are very real and terrifying. But *what* they are is a completely different matter.

FT: What do you think a poltergeist is?

PH: A manifestation of pain within a family.

BB: I want to agree, as both the Pontefract and Coventry families had surprisingly similar backgrounds and circumstances on many levels: working class, council house, adolescent girl in residence, tension in the house and so on – but I can't help but feel that both families' homes were targeted by an entity that was *beyond* the family. I've heard it suggested that water – underground springs, for example; which were certainly there in the case of the Pontefract location – can act as a catalyst for such manifestations too. Lisa, the mother from the family in the Coventry manifestation,

described seeing a creature standing in the upstairs window of her house after they had fled a particularly violent episode. She saw this thing with her own eyes and described it as "seven to eight feet [2–2.4m] tall, not human, more like an animal".

I believe that a poltergeist could be some extraordinary psychokinetic event, and, if so, science should be all over this. But, sadly, science seems to have concluded a long time ago that ghosts are for kooks.

Mind you, having said that, in the case of the Coventry poltergeist it's worth mentioning that one element differed greatly from the generally accepted view that in the vicinity of every poltergeist manifestation is a troubled adolescent girl. In this case, the previous family that lived in the house moved out in the middle of the night leaving everything behind, and the old lady who lived there before them complained of being hounded by something unseen. So, if that is a psychokinetic



Nostalgic 1970s set dressing...

event, it's a complex one, as it would appear that is isn't connected to any single individual. Plus Ellie, Lisa's daughter, is a bright and gentle 11-year-old, not in any way the troubled youth you'd assume.

FT: Is the family still living there?

BB: Lisa moved the family out to her mother's house and then on to a temporary house because the poltergeist living there is too violent. It has actually broken the back legs of two of the family dogs, both of which had to be put down. Perhaps what's even more extraordinary is that not only did the council refuse to move her and her kids out – on the basis that 'hauntings' are not on their list of priorities – but that as soon as Lisa took her family out of there they moved another family in.

FT: And have they experienced anything strange?

BB: Absolutely. A disbelieving neighbour of Lisa's saw toothbrushes floating outside of the upstairs window and knocked on the door to tell the new family what she saw with her own eyes. She has since apologised to Lisa for refusing to believe her. I hope the family are doing ok. They're the second family to live in the house since Lisa moved out, and the fifth in 18 months. It was Lisa's dream home. An end of terrace house with a large garden for the kids and pets to play in – she didn't want to move.

I suppose what I am trying to say – and to pre-empt the accusation – is that what happened to Lisa and her children was definitely not a cry for help on Lisa's part. She was very happy there initially, until she was hounded out of the house by this entity. The fire pit at the bottom of her garden said it all for me; there was this working class family that could barely afford to feed and clothe themselves taking out everything – from ornaments, to cupboard doors, from mattresses, to favourite toys – and burning it. Anything that the Poltergeist touched basically: torched.

The similarities between Lisa's poltergeist and the Pontefract events are startling: council house, working class family, the pools of water, objects being thrown, people being shoved and slapped, the occasional extreme violence. But, in fairness to the Pontefract family, part of the charm is their stoicism; they refused to be hounded out of their home and instead gave 'it' a name – "Fred" – and lived with it for years. I think that is incredible.

FT: Bil, you told me a few weeks ago about something odd that happened quite recently...

BB: Yes, we did have a very weird thing happen during a distributor viewing. Getting distributors together to see your movie is about the most important bit of the process, because if they don't see it you can't sell it, which basically means you are dead in the water, money wasted, game over. So you don't mess with these people.

We had organised a viewing at a screening room in Soho and about 30 or more of these precious individuals turned up, which was incredible, really. The lights went out and they all settled down to watch a movie called *When The Lights Went Out*. Twenty minutes into the viewing, there was a total power failure – but only to that room! The rest of the screening house was fine, but that room was in total darkness – no lights, no projector, nothing – so we had to abandon the screening.

But it doesn't end there. We arranged a second screening for the following morning, on a different screen, and a reduced number of distributors returned for a second attempt. And guess what? The same bloody thing happened! Total power failure to the screening room they were all in. And once again, it was only that screen...

FT: I still have a suspicion that you set this up.

BB: No! I swear to you I had nothing to do with it! I actually wasn't even at those screenings – they were



An attempt to communicate with the poltergeist

organised by our sales agents. Seriously spooky... We finally had a successful viewing for the few distributors that dared come back at a totally different screening house.

FT: Your background is marketing, isn't it Bil? Will you be involved in promoting the film?

BB: Oh, absolutely. I intend to make this the most discussed movie in the UK! It doesn't have any big stars, which I believe is right for this story. It's all about the authentic delivery of the plot – the accents are true, the 70s styling is incredible... but that does make it trickier to promote, as that's the way the

movie industry usually works, focusing on stars...

FT: The poster image should help – it's very striking.

BB: Yes, it's by Rankin! He came to see a preview of the movie a while back and offered to apply his talents to the poster. Tasha Connor – who is just wonderful as Sally – looks both haunted and beautiful. It's a brilliant image, and it really hints at how violent the events became.

But, what I was going to say was... I do now have a big star to promote the film! Last month, I was up in Pontefract and took the opportunity to visit the house at 30

East Drive. I got there and, believe it or not, the place was for sale. So I bought it!

Now I have a star! The real star of the film! We're running a national competition to find two people to go to the Red Carpet Premiere of the movie in the house, on their own – to watch the movie about events that happened in that actual house! We'll definitely need to webcam them – you know, Infrared, green eyes – and watch their reactions!

I can't guarantee that there's a poltergeist there any more... but I can't guarantee that there isn't.

When the Lights Went Out opens in the UK on 7 September



Ghost tours at the haunted house

PICK OF THE POLTS

The Pontefract Poltergeist is not the only one to resist easy explanation or debunking. Here are eight more classic cases to challenge the sceptics.

Thornton Heath, Croydon, England, 1938

Well-witnessed case, involving strange phenomena centring on an adult woman and eventually linked with a sexual trauma during childhood. Researched by the American investigator Dr Nandor Fodor, this case interested Sigmund Freud, by then living in London. Because of the sensitive and controversial nature of the sexual theories, the research was discouraged and eventually stopped by one research body and details were not published until nearly 20 years afterwards.

See: Nandor Fodor: "The Haunting at Thornton Heath", *Tomorrow* 5:2, winter 1957; Nandor Fodor: *On the Trail of the Poltergeist*, 1960.



Parapsychological Association.

Hannath Hall, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, England, 1957

Poltergeist phenomena occurred at the home of Derek Page MP and were witnessed by investigators Tony Cornell and Dr Alan Gauld, who heard raps and encountered object movements. Reported in the *Journal of the SPR* (1960) and the book *Poltergeists* (1979) by the researchers.

See: AD Cornell & Alan Gauld: "A Fenland Poltergeist", *Jnl SPR* 40:705, Sept 1960.

Sauchie, Scotland, 1960

Phenomena centred on a 14-year-old girl, Virginia. Investigated by Dr George Owen who was impressed by the quality of the witnesses and later wrote the book *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* (1964). Rapping noises were recorded by the BBC. An analysis of the sound recording some 50 years later by Dr Barrie Colvin reveals an acoustical pattern only so far identified in poltergeist cases.

See: ARG Owen: "The Sauchie Poltergeist of 1960", *Tomorrow* 10:2, spring 1962; ARG Owen: *Can We Explain The Poltergeist?*, 1964.



clockwise direction close to the agent and in a long, tangential and counter-clockwise manner when separated from him by a considerable distance, resembling a beam of energy produced by two transmitters.

See: William G Roll, Donald S Burdick & William T Jones: "Radial and Tangential Forces in the Miami Poltergeist", *Research in Parapsychology 1972: Abstracts and Papers from the 15th Annual Convention of the*

Rosenheim, Bavaria, Germany, 1967

Investigated by scientists and perhaps the best-witnessed case of modern times. Poltergeist phenomena disturbed a lawyer's office in Rosenheim, Bavaria (left). Electrical anomalies included telephone calls made to the speaking clock at a rate faster than any human could dial. Investigated by Dr Hans Bender and the University of Freiburg physics department. Phenomena captured on video included swinging lights and a rotating clock. An attack on the researchers mounted by a sceptical journalist led to a court case in 1971 in which the investigators were awarded compensation. The case was re-examined for the BBC television series *A Leap in the Dark* (1975) which corroborated events and tracked down the young woman who had been the focus of the phenomena.

See: Hans Bender: "New Developments in Poltergeist Research", *Proceedings of the Parapsychological Association* 6, 1969; Hans Bender: "Modern Poltergeist Research – A Plea for an Unprejudiced View" in John Beloff (ed): *New Directions in Parapsychology*, 1974.

Miami, Florida, USA, 1967

Well-documented and researched case occurring at a warehouse in Miami, Florida, in 1967, focusing on a 19-year-old male employee. Extensively detailed in books by William Roll and generating some interesting data and theories. It was noted that movements occurred in a short, radial and

Olive Hill, Kentucky, USA, 1968

Phenomena witnessed in a domestic dwelling by two parapsychologists who saw objects start to move. Tables and a cabinet were moved, leading investigator William Roll to wonder if once an object has been moved it is more likely to be moved again, making it suitable to be a control.

See: William G Roll: *The Poltergeist*, 1977; William G Roll: "Earlier RSPK cases", *Research in Parapsychology 1974: Abstracts and Papers from the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the Parapsychological Association*.

Enfield, London, England, 1977–78

Lengthy and controversial poltergeist case which occurred in the home of a single mother and her teenage children (opposite). Investigated by the late Maurice Grosse and Guy Lyon Playfair, who wrote a book on the case. Enfield featured a mysterious gruff voice produced by the false vocal chords of an 11-year-old girl. Despite an offer of £1,000 reward, no one has managed to replicate the voice under similar conditions. Attacked by sceptics, the authors took successful legal actions to defend their reputations. In October 1987, the case was attacked by Nicholas Humphreys in a Channel 4 TV programme on British television, but Humphreys declined to take part in a *Right to Reply* programme the following week which brought in Maurice Grosse to answer the criticisms. Although the case has been subject to much criticism from authors approaching it from secondary sources, the 200-page re-examination conducted by the Society for Psychical Research has been ignored or misquoted. Since 2007, only one critic of the case has actually examined the evidence held in the SPR archive. This is Dr Melvyn Willin, who announced in May 2009 that he had changed his mind and was now satisfied that trickery was inadequate as an explanation.

See: Maurice Grosse & Guy Lyon Playfair: *This House is Haunted*, 1980; 2009.

South Shields, Tyneside, England, 2006

Case occurring in a private house in South Shields, Tyneside, England. Witnessed and researched by Mike Hollowell and Darren Ritson. The authors had the good fortune of being alerted to events at an early stage, with numerous alleged paranormal incidents going far beyond the usual poltergeist repertoire of raps, object movements and levitations. Phenomena included physical assaults and scratches inflicted on one resident, and examples of matter-through-matter penetration. Most remarkable of all were apparent attempts at communication from the poltergeist, suggesting a rudimentary and malevolent intelligence at work. At least a dozen reliable witnesses. Numerous photographs and recordings made at the location awaiting further analysis.

See: Michael J Hollowell & Darren W Ritson: *The South Shields Poltergeist*, 2010.

she described a cold hand which seized her neck. This was described by one commentator in sensational terms:

*The black spirit subjected her to more and more violent temptations... he made himself master of her whole interior. He entered into her and uttered by her mouth demoniac discourses. The spirit [of a black monk] appears to her sometimes in human shape coming towards her. Then she hears a few brief words: "Won't you give me an answer? I shall torment you." Remaining silent the maid next hears the words: "Well, I shall enter into you..." She loses her individuality; feels she is no longer present in her own body; she speaks with a bass voice in the person of the monk, through her own lips – diabolically distorted.*¹⁴

It was claimed that manifestations were attempting to draw attention to crimes committed on the site in which young nuns had been seduced and the resulting babies murdered, with the bones thrown into a pit to rot. The white spirit said that Magdalena's sufferings would only end if her parents' house were to be demolished. Very obligingly, her mother and father declared this would be done, and the house was duly pulled down. In 1833, the last wall collapsed revealing a hole in which bones were found and almost from that moment the possession of Magdalena ceased and she returned to normal.

It seems improbable that this obscure story, published in German in 1966, could have been an inspiration for the Pontefract case. More recently, a second poltergeist case involving a phantom monk has been reported from North Wales. This was the 'Brother Doli case' reported by the Society for Psychical Research in 2002 and which occurred in a middle-class household at Mold. Unexplained stains and carvings of images and Welsh words were found discovered inside and outside the house. Sounds of footsteps, bangs and crashes,

strange smells, pools of water, temperature variations, electrical anomalies and object movements were reported by the family concerned. Photographs taken at the property showed unexplained monk-like shapes, with the household giving the name 'Brother Doli' to the presence. An investigation by Michael Daniels failed to resolve whether the reports were "the result of an elaborate hoax, or whether there is a mixture of genuine and fabricated incidents".¹⁵

Looking back at the 'Black Monk' case, it's easy to see why Colin Wilson concluded that a rudimentary and somewhat malevolent external intelligence was at work in Pontefract, even if ultimately its main intention seemed to be to frighten rather than inflict actual physical harm. The responsive nature of the phenomena and the apparition certainly gave the impression of a discarnate entity. Perhaps few parapsychologists will share Wilson's views, and attempts to distinguish between poltergeists attributable to the unconscious mind and those suggestive of discarnate spirits have not been notably successful.¹⁶ But given that we have no adequate scientific model to explain the workings of human consciousness, Wilson's views deserve consideration, and we should certainly be cautious of dismissing the Black Monk of Pontefract as being a case of "all in the mind".

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NOTES

[1] Colin Wilson: *D. Mail*, 9 June 2000; Lecture to the Society for Psychical Research, 18 June 1992. For a detailed account of the case see: Colin Wilson: *Poltergeist! A Study in Destructive Haunting*, New English Library, 1981.

[2] There is a minor date discrepancy in Wilson's book; the text identifies the August Bank holiday week 1966, though the dust jacket of the paperback 1985 edition claims events began on "Thursday June 1st 1966".

[3] *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 11 Sept 1968.

[4] *Journal of Paraphysics*, Spontaneous Directory 1968.

[5] The Enfield Poltergeist is

the subject of *This House is Haunted* (1980, 2009) by Maurice Grosse & Guy Lyon Playfair.

[6] Case at Great Cornard, Suffolk, 1971 – personal communication by the late Mick Brooks to Alan Murdie, 24 Dec 1977.

[7] See for example the Pillay case in India in 1926 cited in D Scott Rogo: *The Poltergeist Experience*, 1979.

[8] The Gorefield Poltergeist, Cambridgeshire, England, 1923, noted in Charles Fort: *Wild Talents*, 1931.

[9] See Alan Gauld & Tony Cornell: *Poltergeists*, 1979.

[10] See Harry Price: *Poltergeist Over England*, 1945.

[11] See Michael J Hollowell & Darren W Ritson: *The South Shields Poltergeist: One*

Family's Fight Against An Invisible Intruder, 2008.

[12] See note 5 above.

[13] Heino Gehrts: *Das Madchen Von Orlach*, Stuttgart, 1966.

[14] Quoted in Tony Finlay: *Exorcism – The Hidden Truth*; <http://bit.ly/RJBstT> (tonyfinlay.co.uk).

[15] The Brother Doli Case: see Michael Daniels: "Investigation Of Apparent Poltergeist-Type Manifestations In North Wales", *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* Vol 66.3, No. 869, 2002, 193–221.

[16] See, for example, Ian Stevenson: "Are Poltergeists Living or Are They Dead?", *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 66, 1972, pp233–52.