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# Bed, Breakfast, and Ghosts

BY LIBBY TUCKER

**Have you ever** spent a night in a haunted bed-and-breakfast? Having stayed in several inns that pride themselves on their resident ghosts, I know that stories about these ghosts' appearances can be the best part of overnight stays. Introduced at breakfast along with blueberry pancakes, waffles, or omelettes, such stories add a dimension of wonder to what might otherwise be a humdrum stay.

I visited several haunted inns during a trip through England with my husband and thirteen-year-old son in 1998. We had won a passage to England on the *Queen Elizabeth II*: the most exciting prize any of us had ever received. The five-day ocean voyage enchanted us with waves of great height, lectures by distinguished authors, and high tea service by white-gloved waiters. Each day on the *Queen Elizabeth II* brought us new insights into British history and culture. Little did we know that our immersion in British history was just beginning. Once we got to England, ghosts would become part of our itinerary.

Our first near-encounter with a supernatural personage took place at an inn in Oxford. Although we had chosen the inn for its proximity to Magdalen College's deer park, we soon discovered that the innkeepers' main claim to fame was their White Lady, who reportedly haunted the second-floor bathroom. "She only comes out late at night," one of the innkeepers assured us. Our son and two other children sitting around the breakfast table looked worried as they ate their eggs and bacon. During the three days that we stayed there, children asked their parents to stand near the bathroom, just in case the White Lady appeared. While I didn't worry about bumping into her, I found myself looking over my shoulder when a bottle of shampoo fell to the bathroom floor. Was there a flash of white in the mirror? Surely not!

Our second encounter occurred up north in Inverness, the realm of the fabled Loch Ness monster. After a frustrating day of

looking through binoculars for the monster, which appeared only in the form of expensive stuffed toys, we went back to our rather modern-looking inn. "This one isn't haunted, is it?" our son asked hopefully. "Oh, yes, of course it is!" our host cheerfully answered. He proceeded to tell us a hair-raising tale of a nearby murder that had left a ghost howling for revenge. By the time we had finished listening to his story, the three of us were beginning to wonder whether an inn without a resident spirit would have been a better choice. It might, however, have been difficult to find a spirit-free inn in Inverness. During the rest of our trip through England, all but one of our bed-and-breakfast establishments turned out to be famous for the presence of ghosts that walked at night.

Although England is the mother country of haunted inns, there are plenty of haunted establishments in the United States. Some of these, such as the Stanley Hotel in Denver, Colorado, have become famous through films. After visiting the Stanley one fall just before it closed for the winter, King wrote his 1977 novel *The Shining*, which vividly describes adult and child ghosts, as well as a vicious spirit that turns a loving father into an axe-wielding maniac. Ever since *The Shining* was published, the Stanley Hotel has welcomed countless curious visitors, including me.

Some haunted inns have become desirable destinations for adolescents' birthday parties. One of the creepiest inns is the Lizzie Borden Bed and Breakfast in Fall River, Massachusetts, which assertively promotes its violent history. If you visit this B and B's web site, you may hear the voice of a little girl singing, "Lizzie Borden took an axe and gave her mother forty whacks." The song, written by a journalist, describes the notorious murder of Andrew and Abby Borden in August 1892. Although their daughter Lizzie was never convicted of killing her parents, local residents believed she had done so, and children followed her around, chanting the "Lizzie Borden" song.

These days, visitors to the Bordens' former home can choose to stay in Andrew's, Abby's, or Lizzie's room. At breakfast time, they eat food similar to the food Lizzie's family ate at the beginning of each day. One of my former students told me about her "sweet sixteen" party at the Borden Bed and Breakfast, including a séance that produced eerie results. After the lights went out and a light bulb exploded, the kids decided not to pursue any further contact with the Bordens' restless spirits!

Another New York inn that advertises a resident ghost is the Ancestors Inn at the Bassett House in Liverpool. Innkeeper Mary Weidman has told reporters that lights go on and off unexpectedly, and photos taken in the inn turn out to be blank. Hannah and George Bassett, the house's original owners, are thought to be the ghostly tricksters that inhabit the inn.

Why do some of us enjoy spending nights in haunted inns like the Stanley Hotel? Surely no one would wish to meet an axe-wielding murderer, but we might like to experience something out of the ordinary. Haunted inns give us, for a short time, an entryway to a domain where ghosts walk and play tricks, where we expect to feel both thrilled and scared. There is also an important margin of safety. After a night of dodging the White Lady on the threshold of a bathroom, guests can expect to sit down to a delicious breakfast of French toast, sausage, and fruit. During breakfast, stories of encounters with the ghost provide something precious to take home: a supernatural narrative to share with family and friends. ▼

Libby Tucker teaches folklore at Binghamton University. Her book *Haunted Halls: Ghostlore of American College Campuses* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007) investigates college ghost stories. Her most recent book is *Children's Folklore: A Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood, 2008).



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