

Poltergeist - What is it ?

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Sunday, 17 June 2007
Last Updated Sunday, 27 July 2008

Although poltergeist stories date back to the first century, most evidence to support the existence of poltergeists is anecdotal, which is hardly surprising as the nature of the phenomenon is unpredictable and sporadic. Descriptions of 'poltergeist' from the internet

Poltergeists are ghosts that make noises or move objects through the air. While ghost hunters are ghost hunting it is sometimes dangerous if there is a poltergeist around.

Poltergeist is a German word from the German verb poltern which means to make noise, rumble or knock, and the word geist which translates as spirit or ghost. In essence, when the terms are combined, you get a noisy ghost, rumbling spirit or a variety of other synonyms. Poltergeists in paranormal studies are often differentiated from other types of ghosts or haunting because of the type of activities they may perform and because they are often closely connected to one resident of a home, often an adolescent girl.

According to accounts of the activities of poltergeists, most of which encounter considerable skepticism by those who don't believe in paranormal lore, poltergeists tend to move things around, may throw things, and may make loud or quiet noises that disturb people's homes. Early incidences of poltergeist activity are documented as far back as the 17th century, and occasionally may have been the impetus for accusing people of witchcraft or devil worship.

There are several theories as to what a poltergeist really is. Some believe that poltergeists are not ghosts at all, but are instead telekinetic abilities manifested by a living person in turmoil. According to this explanation, this is why the focus of the incident is on a single person and frequently on adolescents. The turmoil of puberty alone could make some people manifest telekinetic incidents, or children or teens who have been abused might use telekinesis as a way of protecting or avenging themselves. The Runcorn poltergeist

It was in August, 1952, that young John Glynn Jones and his family, living in Byron Street, Runcorn, first came face to face with what was then called the supernatural, now more clinically known as the paranormal. John, aged 17, was an apprentice draughtsman employed by the I.C.I. at their Weston Point establishment.

He was a well-behaved, rather serious young man interested only in getting on with his job and studies with a view to qualifying as a draughtsman, and he was regarded by his family, friends and colleagues as normal in every way, though of a retiring disposition.

The trouble began in mid-August, 1952, when the tenant of No.1 Byron Street, Mr Sam Jones (aged 68), his sister-in-law Mrs Lucy Jones, his grandchildren John and Eileen Glynn, and a middle aged spinster lodging in the house were joined for the weekend by Mrs Jones's son and his wife on a visit from North Wales.

Mr Sam Jones and young John had to share a double bed in one bedroom while Lucy Jones and young Eileen shared another bed in the same room.

No sooner had they got into bed and were trying to get to sleep than the dressing-table started to make noises. The noises got louder and louder until all four occupants were driven from the room, then silence reigned for the time being.

When they returned to their beds the noises started up again and there was no more sleep for any of them. The next night was even worse, with the dressing-table drawers sounding as if they were being pulled out, rattled and slammed back again.

Again the nuisance stopped when the occupants left the bedroom but started up again when they returned to their beds there. This time the dressing-table moved about a foot from the wall of its own accord.

As usually happens in cases of such phenomena, John was the first suspect, guilty of a teenage hoax, and before many more wakeful nights had passed he was subjected to all kinds of tests to find out whether he was the cause of it all.

Proof that John was not the guilty party was forthcoming when, despite four witnesses actually sitting on him as he lay in bed, the manifestations continued in their presence.

A widely held theory among authorities on the subject is that where there is poltergeist-type activity some teenager, usually a female, is being used as a nexus or agent by the poltergeist entity, which draws on their psychic energy, unknown to the victim, to create the various manifestations.

One might call such entities invisible vandals, though the annoyance caused and the actual damage done is anything but

invisible. The poltergeist is a pastmaster at sound effects, moving some solid objects and levitating others.

In some cases on record candles and coals have been fired like bullets into walls and ceilings, glass and china smashed, doors and windows rattled and flung open, however securely they have been fastened. The Byron Street phenomena occurred in cycles, peaceful interludes alternating with spells of pandemonium.

Anyone wishing to read a blow by blow account of this case has only to turn up the files of the 'Runcorn Guardian' for August, September, October 1952, where the ten-week run of strange happenings is recorded.

Advice and offers of help came from all over the world, as did curious visitors. One letter was from Germany enclosing a formula for exorcism. Unfortunately the envelope had been opened in transit and one of the four vital pieces of paper was found to be missing.

Exorcism rarely works in such cases but it was claimed that this formula had been used with success in a German poltergeist outbreak which had lasted 15 months.

Mr Sam Jones said that he had lived in the house for 35 years and had had the dressing-table for 42 years but he had never known anything like it before. Even when the drawers were sealed with adhesive paper they continued to rattle and the mirror swung backwards and forwards on its pivots.

Three burly policemen were thrown off an empty chest on the landing and soon realised that the 'disorderly conduct' at No.1 was something outside their knowledge and control.

At one stage a spiritualist medium, Mr Francis, was called in and a seance held but they only seemed to make matters worse. Two bibles, a picture-book, a tin of ointment and a table cover were thrown about the bedroom in front of witnesses. There followed a quiet period which enabled the family to catch up on some sleep, but early in September the 'ghost' returned with a vengeance. One witness reported that a clock and several other items moved a distance of five feet across the bedroom in his presence.

Later in September there were more violent happenings and at one point John was lifted out of his bed and deposited on the floor. By this time the London based Society for Psychical Research started to take an interest and several members were invited to come and observe the phenomena for themselves.

One member with whom I became friendly, was the Rev. W H Stevens, a local Methodist minister, who was appointed the society's official investigator. On entering this haunted house he was welcomed by being hit on the head with a dictionary.

Mr Steven's theory, a familiar one in the world of the paranormal, was that the force responsible for all these mischievous manifestations was being exerted, albeit unwittingly, by John Glynn himself. It was the result of a build up of repressed energy, such as one finds in a teenager, being abused by an evil entity. After each display of phenomena it took time for the 'accumulator' containing this energy to recoup before the next outburst.

There have been - and still are - scores of parallel cases, but whether the energy in question is of a psychic, sexual, or some other nature is not yet known. He ruled out the possibility that what was happening could be some form of hoax.

At times, as many as fourteen observers were witnesses to the levitation of household objects, the breaking of china and general vandalism. The kitchen ceiling under the bedroom began to crack and the laths were exposed.

In the belief that the whole matter was getting out of hand, the house was closed to random investigators and press reporters. Friends invited John Glynn to their house in Frodsham, a nearby village, where they held an outdoor lunch party to give him some relaxation from the strain and suffering. One of the guests noted that a glass of lemonade being poured for John burst in the hostess's hand; none of the lemonade fell on the floor but John was drenched in it.

Long after the phenomena ceased, sometime in October, it was revealed that the total cost of the damage done by the poltergeist at No1 Byron Street and surrounding properties, including a neighbouring pig farm, had been estimated at £20,000.

As usual in such cases, there was no satisfactory explanation as to the cause of all the trouble and damage caused.

The SPR investigator, the local spiritualist organisation, and the several independent psychic 'detectives' could not agree on the origin of the phenomena, or on what an ordinary, quiet living family could have done to invite the attentions of some evil force to wreak its vengeance on their household and disturb their lives in this way.

At the end of ten weeks of infestation only the visible cracks in the fabric of the building reminded the passer-by what an invisible vandal can do.