

From In Search of the Paranormal

We rolled up the long driveway to St. Botolph's church on a warm Saturday afternoon in the summer. The church was nestled amongst beautiful surroundings, rolling green flatlands reminiscent of a picturesque postcard. Parking the cars next to a gatehouse covered in plants, our group entered the churchyard and began to unload boxes and bags of equipment.

Remember that this was the Nineties, long before the cheap EMF meter explosion rocked the world of paranormal investigation. Tape recorders, flashlights, and still cameras formed our basic kit. If you were really lucky – and we were – then you might be able to scrape up a VHS camcorder or two. Portable walkie-talkie radios were our communications link with one another.

Looking around at the quaint stone church and tower, I was struck by how peaceful everything seemed – not in the least bit creepy.

“This place changes after dark,” Andrew remarked. “Just you wait, mate. You’ll see.”

At the time, we had no idea just how right he was.

Rumors abound to this day about the use of St Botolph's for rituals performed by those who are interested in the occult. While I can't say for sure whether this is true, our first sweep of the location did lend credence to rumors of ritualistic practice and animal abuse.

At the rear of the property stand six gravestones dating back to the Second World War. There lie buried several unidentified sailors, crew of a steamship – the *S.S. Orsa* - that was bound for Bordeaux on Saturday, October 21st, 1939, with a cargo of coal. The *Orsa* was sunk by a German mine with the loss of sixteen crewmen. The bodies of some of those drowned crewmen washed ashore on a nearby beach at Saltfleet.

The area surrounding these war graves had a very peaceful atmosphere, but it didn't take long for one of the investigators to discover something out of place. Several decapitated chicken torsos were scattered in the long grass.

I thought that it might perhaps be a fox or some form of local wildlife. Taking a knee, Andrew shook his head. He pointed at the chicken necks for emphasis, indicating that they were artificial rather than natural. The wounds had most definitely been inflicted with some kind of sharp slicing implement, rather than torn by the teeth of some nocturnal predator. The chicken bodies were also intact, without evidence of other wounds or bites. And the heads were missing. A hungry animal would have eaten the bodies and left the heads.

We took pictures and left the scene undisturbed, then fanned out to search the churchyard.

Gravestones had been shattered, cracked, and desecrated. Human excrement was smeared across several of them. Flowers were uprooted and scattered around the cemetery. Obscene graffiti defaced the back of many grave markers. Was this vandalism the work of unruly local kids, or something more sinister?

I followed Tracey and Andrew inside the church. The sturdy wooden doors had been wrenched off and burned inside the church, according to the caretaker, a Mr. Beaufort. Stepping into the stone-clad shadowy interior, I suddenly felt cold – entirely understandable, given the change in environment. None of the windows contained glass, leaving the church entirely open to the elements. Given how cold it was now, I was glad I'd brought a sleeping bag and some warm clothing to see me through the night.

We split up and began to take photographs while the daylight remained strong.

Even today, I still insist that the human eye and an inquiring mind are the most indispensable tools of any paranormal investigator. A notebook and pen are not far behind. Everything else is negotiable. The true pioneers in this field relied on little else, and achieved some truly impressive results.

Tracey called us over to the nave. Several pentagrams were visible, staining the flagstones and the walls. Some were obviously orange spray paint, but others looked disconcertingly like blood. Burned-down candles congealed into piles of wax at the corners. More human waste was smeared across the walls and flagstones. It appeared relatively fresh, no more than a day or two old.

Somebody had obviously gone to great lengths to desecrate this truly beautiful old church. It made us all angry, but there was an underlying current of nervousness setting in as well. Would whoever it was return to find us here after dark?