

Ravenswood

Prepare yourself for an extraordinary journey that began one year ago today. A tale of both scepticism and belief that combined science and the supernatural. My journey into the heart of Ravenswood Asylum challenged everything I thought I knew and has left me forever changed.

My name is Steve, a journalist by trade and a cynic by heart. My scepticism wasn't rooted in ignorance but forged from my rather practical mind that sought to find physical evidence rather than relying on hearsay and out-of-focus photographs. Following the death of my sister, my mother was conned out of many thousands of pounds trying to contact her in the afterlife. That experience drove me to spend every spare moment since then debunking ghostly happenings and exposing charlatans posing as mediums. This solidified my belief in the tangible, observable world we all inhabit. However, my latest investigation was about to challenge everything I thought I knew. Curiosity, mingled with my innate scepticism, led me to accept an invitation from a local ghost-hunting team. They believed my viewpoint would lend credibility to one of their investigations. It made me the ideal candidate to join them and observe everything that happens in their exploration of the Ravenswood Asylum for the Clinically Insane.

As we approached the asylum, the crunch of gravel underneath our wheels seemed to add to the eeriness of the decrepit building before us. We parked under a large, gnarled tree. Its branches stretched out over us like a giant skeletal hand, casting elongated shadows which danced eerily in the moonlight. Climbing out of our vehicles, a sense of unease ran through us as we stood looking up at the Asylum. The clouds parted revealing a moon which hung like a ghostly lantern in the night sky. The foreboding structure of Ravenswood Asylum loomed from the darkness, its silhouette etched with a history of horror. As the wind howled, a sinister rustling amongst the trees whispered tales of the madness once confined within these crumbling walls.

And so, there I was a sceptic among believers, poised to enter the halls of the notorious asylum. The building, shrouded in a history filled with darkness and despair, stood before us as a testament to the suffering endured by its former inhabitants. Stories told of strange happenings within its walls, souls condemned, trapped, and unable to find peace in the afterlife.

As the evening's darkness crept in around us, we circled the old asylum. The silence in the grounds was punctuated only by an owl hooting somewhere close by. Making our way around the decrepit building, attempting to acquaint ourselves with its oppressive aura, I felt an undeniable sense of dread crawl over me, goosebumps appearing on my skin despite any rational explanations.

The asylum now silhouetted against the dusky sky, a monolith of despair. Its crumbling brickwork and ivy-entwined walls seemed to pulsate with an eerie life of their own. Every instinct screamed at me to flee, yet I was rooted, captivated by the dark allure of the building which once contained the tormented minds and bodies of the clinically insane. I can't explain why this feeling came over me. Ghosts don't exist. We approached the dilapidated structure, the moon, casting a haunting glow on the building's facade, its broken windows like empty eye sockets staring back at us.

“You ready for this, Steve?” asked Mark, the team’s leader. A man whose belief in the paranormal was as unwavering as my own disbelief.

“I suppose,” I replied, my voice unexpectedly betraying a hint of apprehension. It wasn’t fear of ghosts that unsettled me, but the thought of what human minds could conjure in the absence of light and reason.

Approaching the heavy wooden front door, Fiona placed a trembling hand on it and pushed, it opened, its rusty hinges groaning in protest, a corridor swallowed by shadows lay ahead. We flicked on our torches; the beams slicing through the darkness as a sudden gust of wind blew through the decrepit doorway. Dust danced in the air, hitting our lungs and forcing us to cough as we squinted through the haze. The scent of decay and mould clung to everything, a testament to many, many years of neglect.

As we crossed the threshold, the air felt colder. The shift in temperature seems to whisper of the unseen. Our footsteps echoed through the deserted corridors, a haunting drumbeat playing on my nerves. “The energy here is overwhelming,” Fiona, the team’s medium, muttered, her voice trembling slightly. “They’re aware of our presence.”

I wanted to dismiss her words, to rely on the logical explanations which always grounded me. Yet, as we delved deeper into the asylum, my belief was challenged by shadows which seemed to move of their own accord, and unexplained noises filling the empty spaces with dread.

Venturing further inside, the air grew even colder; the beam of our torches danced across peeling paint and discarded furniture, left from a bygone era.

“This place is a goldmine of activity,” intimated Fiona, her voice barely above a breath. “The spirits here seem restless tonight.”

I rolled my eyes in the darkness, it made no sense but I couldn’t shake the feeling that something unseen was watching, waiting, its stare intensely fixed on my every action. With each reluctant step I took, a cold shiver ran down my spine as if I was crossing a line into the realm of the unknown. The air was stale and the building itself seemed to pulse with a life of its own, a life wrought from many years of anguish and despair. As we delved deeper, the darkness seemed to be absorbing everything from our torch beams to our very essences.

What secrets did this place hold?

As the door creaked shut behind us, it felt as though our fate was being sealed. It then occurred to me the night had only just begun, and my scepticism was about to be tested by those silhouettes dancing just beyond the reach of our torches.

Stepping cautiously into the dim corridor, our senses were amplified, ears straining for noises that sounded like voices of the past, eyes darting to catch every fleeting shadow. We made our way to the Nurses station, where Tom pointed to the spot where a teenage girl’s life tragically ended. “This is where they found her body,” he announced, his voice carrying a gravity chilling me to the bone. “Some say it was misadventure; others say murder.”

The surrounding air seemed thick as if it had absorbed the sorrow and madness that had once lived within these walls. Despite my scepticism, I couldn't deny the eerie mood which hung over us, a feeling of being watched, of whispers just beyond the edge of our hearing. The night stretched out before us, filled with the threat of unseen horrors and unexplained phenomena.

Fiona's gaze fixated on the upper floor balcony, her voice trembling slightly in the vast space of the asylum. "Do any of you see that?" she said in a hushed tone, pointing upwards, her finger trembling. "It's a face." Her eyes widened with excitement as she stared at the apparition none of us could see. "It looked like a pale woman in white was staring at me," she murmured.

My heart settled when Fiona finally turned away, dismissing the vision as a trick of the light. She'd been looking into a reflection in another room's mirror, which explained why the rest of us hadn't seen anything. A collective sigh of relief brushed through us all. We continued our cautious exploration, examining each darkened corner and hidden crevice before advancing further into the asylum's depths.

Tom and his crew had been granted exclusive access to explore the mysterious, and reputedly haunted corridors of the asylum.

Curiosity piqued, I asked Tom, "What drew you to this place? What's the story here?"

Tom's face was a mask of serious contemplation as he recounted tales as chilling as the very air around us.

"Strange occurrences, inexplicable events," he began. "Doors slamming shut, footsteps echoing in empty halls, faces glimpsed momentarily, then vanishing. People have even claimed a sense of being followed by an unseen presence, hearing ghostly voices murmuring either, 'help!' or 'get out!'"

I shook my head, a wry smile of scepticism on my face. "Surely that's just someone's overactive imagination at play?"

Tom nodded. "Perhaps, but hopefully tonight might change your mind. Now, let's get set up, shall we?" he urged.

Fiona and Tom sprang into action, positioning cameras and sensors throughout the building. They were methodical, each move calculated and precise. Their equipment was state-of-the-art, designed to detect even the faintest anomalies. Despite my scepticism, I found myself drawn into their world. My curiosity increased by the prospect of uncovering something truly inexplicable.

As the night unfolded, a sense of expectancy hung in the air. Fiona and Tom, both seasoned in their field, moved with a quiet confidence. They reported witnessing unexplainable events which fuelled their determination to find the truth.

"Fiona, how did you find yourself in the field of ghost hunting?" I asked, as we waited for something to happen.

She recounted the tale of their beginnings, a call from a desperate couple plagued by what they believed to be spirits. “We spent two nights in their home but found nothing,” Fiona said, a touch of regret in her voice. “Not every investigation yields results, but we keep searching.”

Tom joined us, his presence solid and reassuring. “Stay vigilant tonight,” he advised. “You may be a sceptic now, but who knows? By morning, you might just be a believer.”

As Fiona set up a REM POD on the Nurses station, my curiosity got the better of me. “What does that do?” I asked, my voice betraying a hint of genuine interest.

Fiona calmly explained,

“The REM POD’s antenna detects energy disturbances in the electrical field which trigger it to alert us to possible contact with spirits. It signals any contact with flashing lights and an audible alarm. Any entity or object with its electromagnetic field can cause a disruption which would be detected by the REM POD. We theorise the energy lingering after death is akin to the energy we possess while alive. To set it off manually, you must come very close to the aerial or touch it, thus disrupting the electromagnetic field. Walking around or waving your hand near it won’t activate the alarm.”

Fiona demonstrated by gracefully waving her hand close to the aerial and banging the top of the desk. No lights flashed; no alarm sounded. I mimicked her action, attempting to trigger the alarm, I did indeed need to physically touch it which then caused the lights to erupt in a dance of colours, and the alarm to sound.

She offered a knowing smile before continuing. “To avoid accidentally setting off the REM POD, we need to be mindful of our mobile phones and walkie-talkies. These devices can trigger it too. This is one of the favoured tools among paranormal investigators, it can be placed in a separate area from the investigators. The REM POD then alerts them with an audio signal when it has been activated. This allows the investigators to take readings elsewhere in the building without needing to be physically present in the same room as the device.”

Mark and Janet, two other members of the ghost-hunting team, headed back to the van, which was to act as their command centre. There were cameras and recording equipment in there enabling them to watch us closely and alert us to things we might have missed. Fiona, Tom and I, along with Carl, another of the teams mediums, remained to begin the hunt for the supernatural. An eager anticipation bubbled inside me as I watched Tom extract more equipment from a large silver case.

“What’s first on the agenda?” I inquired.

“We’re starting with EVP recorders, Electronic Voice Phenomena. These are unexplained voices captured on our audio recording devices,” Tom replied, his voice steady and reassuring.

“But couldn’t the recorders just be picking up interference from local radio bands or static?” I queried, my scepticism peeking through.

“That’s always a possibility,” Tom conceded. “However, we meticulously analyse each recording to eliminate such interference. When we pose questions, we hope to receive intelligent, complex responses. Sometimes the answers we receive are so precise, they can only be attributed to spirits intelligently answering back.”

Before proceeding further, I felt the need to clarify my position. “I must apologise for any of my questions which might seem sceptical or dismissive. Please understand, it’s not my intention to offend or disrespect. As a sceptic, I can only trust what I witness first-hand and, in that way, conclude it was not being faked.”

Tom’s response came with a warm, reassuring smile. “That’s absolutely fine. We’re used to such inquiries from non-believers. It’s your prerogative to question our findings, and it’s our objective to hopefully provide you with incontrovertible evidence. Rest assured, nothing here has been, or will be, manipulated. Every sound, motion, and occurrence are being documented in the command centre. Besides Janet and Mark, who are outside, we’re alone here. Carl will later attempt to demonstrate his ability to communicate with the spirits.” Tom’s assurance was a testament to the seriousness and dedication with which they approached their craft, setting the stage for a night of exploration.

“Alright, I’m prepared whenever you are,” I said, my voice uncontrollably laced with tension.

Tom activated the voice recorder and positioned it carefully on the tabletop. “Is there anyone here who wishes to communicate with us tonight?” he inquired, his voice steady in the enveloping silence, “Can you tell us why you remain here?” After a moment’s pause, he switched off the recorder and played back the audio. We leaned in as one, a collective breath held, only to be greeted by the disappointing crackle of static.

Undeterred, Tom repeated the two questions, his voice resonating in the darkness. Again, the response was nothing but the eerie hiss of static.

Carl, with his eyes closed and head tilted, whispered, “I’m sensing nothing in this area. Perhaps we should venture to the first floor.”

“Why the first floor?” I asked, my interest rising.

“People have reported hearing unexplained voices there. Some have even said they have experienced being forcefully pushed against the walls,” Carl explained.

We reached the staircase, its form looming ominously from the gloom. Step by step, we ascended, our senses heightened, straining to catch any sound or movement. Reaching the top, Fiona grasped Carl’s arm.

“Look, down the corridor,” she said urgently, pointing towards a room on the right, “I just saw a shadow figure slip into that room.”

Fuelled by her observation, we hastened down the corridor, our night vision cameras scanning the darkness. As we neared the room, the door abruptly slammed shut, stopping me in my tracks, my heart started racing wildly.

Disbelief etched on my face, as I watched Tom courageously open the door. I approached and peered in. “Who’s in here?” I asked, my voice echoing in the quiet room.

I entered the room, my gaze darting around, searching for any hint of a crew member or an explanation. Our torches cut through the gloom, revealing a room cluttered with debris and decay. The walls were stripped bare, the damp had claimed the old paint. There was no place for anyone to hide, no alternative exits. The windows were barred and sealed shut; the wind was not the culprit here. How had the door slammed?

Carl stepped into the centre of the room, his expression grave. “There is an angry presence here,” he announced, scanning the space as if seeing beyond the visible. “It doesn’t want us here.”

Fiona, ever the professional, took out her own voice recorder. “Is anyone here with us? ... Do you wish for us to leave?” The air turned frigid, the temperature dropping rapidly.

Fiona played back the recording. Her voice echoed eerily in the room, a disruption in the dark void. “Is anyone else here with us?” She replayed the segment, our anticipation palpable. Suddenly, a hoarse, raspy affirmation broke through the static, ‘YES!’ It was unmistakable. She replayed it, and again the same ‘YES!’ resonated.

Fiona was unable to conceal her excitement. “This is amazing. We’ve never had responses this quick or this clear before.”

But my scepticism, as always, planted a seed of doubt in my mind. Could this have been pre-recorded? I needed to be sure.

“May I try?” I asked, the rational part of me seeking to debunk any trickery. “It would help eliminate the possibility of any pre-recorded responses.” My suggestion was met with nods of agreement as we all stood enveloped in the chilling mystery of the room, each of us pondering the reality of what we might be facing.

“Here, have a go,” Fiona offered, her voice tinged with a hint of mystery. “Press here to record and here to stop.”

“Thank you.” I took the recorder with a slight tremor in my hands, mustering as much courage as I could, I attempted to stop my voice wavering and spoke into the device. “Is there anyone in this room who does not want us here?” I paused, allowing the silence to fill the space before stopping the recording and handing it back to Fiona.

We huddled together, listening intently to the playback. My voice echoed in the room, “Is there anyone in this room who does not want us here?” Then, amidst the hiss of static, a loud, raspy voice shattered the silence, ‘GET OUT!’ A chill coursed through my body, goosebumps erupting along my neck and arms. At that same moment, the door slammed shut behind us with an ominous thud.

“Whoa! What the...” I rushed to the door, and straight away my palms became slick with sweat. Grabbing the handle, I tugged desperately at the door, only to find it immovable. Tom joined me, his attempts equally futile. A strange, muffled cry echoed from the other side,

causing us to recoil. The door shook violently in its frame, its creaks resonating through the room like a scene from a gothic horror movie.

Carls' voice broke the eerie stillness, "She killed herself. She hung herself in this room. I don't know who she was but I can feel her presence."

As abruptly as it began, the rattling of the door stopped. Tom cautiously opened the door revealing a silent, empty corridor.

My heart pounded against my ribcage. "Incredible! How on earth did you orchestrate this? That was impressive. You certainly had me going there." I gasped, half in disbelief, half in awe.

Tom's face was ashen, his eyes wide with genuine shock. "I swear... we didn't stage any of this. It's all real."

He grabbed his walkie-talkie. "Tom to command centre... anything on the first-floor cameras? We're heading back. We need to examine any recordings."

We regrouped at the command centre where Mark and Janet had been reviewing the footage. They played back the moment the door slammed; the sound echoing through the speakers. The video showed us heading towards the room, and a short time later a dark silhouette fleeting across the screen just before the door slammed shut for the second time. No one seemed to tamper with the door as the corridor appeared deserted.

My gaze fixated on the screen. "You mean this actually happened? It's a genuine supernatural event?"

Excitement rippled through Fiona, Tom, and Carl as they pored over the footage again, searching for any discrepancies. They turned to each other, all slapping high fives with shouts of "Yes!"

Tom turned to me. "So, what do you think now?"

I hesitated, my scepticism at war with what I just witnessed. "I'm... I'm not sure how you did that. But it was certainly impressive."

Tom's smile was confident, reassuring. "You really are a sceptic. I promise you; we didn't fabricate this."

"And the voice?" I asked.

"That wasn't us, either," Fiona affirmed, her face beaming with delight.

As I watched, Carl became captivated by the audio, his attention fixated on the headphones, his eyes widened. "Whoa! Everyone, listen to this."

He passed the headphones to Tom. "Check this out, mate."

I stood there, a part of me still rationalising the recent events, while another part of me was teetering on the brink of belief. The night was still young and already the asylum was unveiling its haunting secrets. What else lay in wait in those shadowed halls and desolate rooms? Only the night would tell.

Tom settled the headphones over his ears and nodded excitedly. He heard sounds, disembodied sounds, coming from the corridor, particularly a soft voice which happened right before the doors started rattling violently. As the clip concluded, he turned to me with an urgency knitting his brow. “Steve, listen to this.”

I took the headphones, and closed my eyes, immersing myself in the auditory world of the spectral recording. Moments later, my eyes flew open, a look of disbelief etching my features. Not fully comprehending what I was listening to, I passed the headphones to Fiona.

“Did you hear that?” Tom’s tense whisper cutting through the atmosphere.

I nodded, my voice barely audible. “It was like a voice pleading, ‘Let me in.’”

Tom’s excitement was infectious. “It’s genuine, I promise you.”

Janet, her curiosity piqued, fished her mobile out of her pocket to check the time. “It’s still early. Let’s continue. We can’t stop now. This place has to be the best place we have ever researched. There’s got to be so much more for us to uncover. This could put us up there with the best.”

Despite my initial scepticism, I couldn’t deny the unexplained phenomena we’d encountered. My logical mind was battling with what my eyes and ears had just witnessed. This cannot be real. I had to figure out how they, or someone else, was manipulating the situation. Carl, however, leaned back, a grin spreading across his face, relishing the thrill of the hunt which drove his passion for the paranormal.

“Right, everyone, you heard Janet, let’s get back to it,” Tom declared, stepping out of the van. “We’ve got more evidence to gather.”

Back in the building, the aged floorboards groaning under our feet, we could hear what sounded like their mournful cries echoing like forlorn wails of the long departed, woven into the very fabric of the asylums’ abandoned halls. It was as if it was mocking our mortal fears with subdued, ethereal laughter.

Fiona halted abruptly; her posture tensed. I sensed her apprehension, imagining she’d glimpsed something sinister lurking in the dark. The group gathered closer, peering into the darkness where Fiona was pointing. It was a rat, scuttling across the room from out of the shadows, prompting a wave of relieved laughter.

The group settled into the next phase of their investigation, their equipment at the ready to receive any ghostly signals.

“Let’s try the spirit box next,” Fiona suggested, as we made our way upstairs.

Tom nodded, his determination to uncover the supernatural was evident. Meanwhile, I was still grappling with my scepticism. “What exactly is a spirit box?” I asked.

Tom explained, “It’s a device used to communicate with spirits.

“When you communicate with a spirit, they can’t articulate like a living person,” Tom explained. “Spirits use the energy of various radio frequencies to make their presence known. The Spirit Box scans through AM and FM channels, attempting to capture any spectral voices.”

As the spirit box crackled to life, scanning through frequencies, we listened intently, waiting for a voice from the other side to break through the static. Anticipation charged the air as each member of the team was poised on the edge of discovery, collectively holding their breath in suspense.

“So there’s a chance we’re just picking up a local radio station’s broadcast, then?” I interjected, my scepticism rising again.

Tom shook his head, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. “Not exactly. The theory that spirits can use radio waves to communicate, though not entirely proven, is widely accepted among investigators. The Spirit Box is programmed to cycle rapidly through the frequencies. This reduces the likelihood of coincidental broadcast voices. If we hear a consistent voice across multiple channels, it’s a strong indication of a spiritual presence.”

“Hmm, I remain unconvinced. Any device capable of receiving external signals is subject to misinterpretation.” I argued, my arms crossed, subconsciously taking a defensive stance.

“We’re meticulous in our approach,” Tom assured. “We carefully examine and filter all pieces of evidence, and just like you, we don’t accept things at face value. Although, I admit we do get excited when things happen, a lot of our evidence we debunk when we sit and examine it properly.”

The spirit box unleashed a torrent of hissing white noise into the room. Fiona and Tom took turns asking questions. Occasionally, a fragmented sound, possibly a word, pierced through the static. usually incoherent utterances. Carl’s gaze intensified as he looked down the corridor. “There’s a strong entity here, lurking just out of sight. Keep the questions going, let’s see if we can get it to engage with us,” he urged.

“Fine, I’ll give it a go. What is my name?” I asked, a tremor in my voice betraying my apprehension.

My heart stalled as a distinctly masculine voice replied, “Steve.” It was as clear as day. I continued, feeling an odd sense of connection. “What is your name?”

Silence followed, so I repeated, “What is your name?”

This time, a faint, childlike voice whispered, ‘Susan.’

Surprised at hearing a child’s voice, I asked, “How old are you, Susan?”

“Eight,” replied the voice instantly.

Carl nodded at me encouragingly. “Carry on.” His hands waving, motivating me to continue.

My face contorted with thought as I asked, “Why are you here?”

A soft, forlorn voice answered, “Afraid.”

“What are you afraid of?” I pressed.

“Him,” came the cryptic response.

Tom was visibly animated. “Fantastic, keep it up.”

“Who frightens you? Does he have a name?” My voice shook slightly as I posed the question. The room was tense with anticipation, the spirit box humming with static. The voice had disappeared.

“Are you convinced yet?” Fiona inquired. A twinkle of excitement in her eyes.

I hesitated. “It is an intriguing experience, sure, but these voices could be interference or external influences on the equipment.”

“I assure you; we don’t manipulate anything. What we’re all hearing is as authentic as it gets,” Tom said earnestly, still trying to convince me.

“I wasn’t accusing you,” I clarified. “I’m just wary of the technology’s vulnerabilities.”

Fiona nodded understandingly. “That’s fair.”

“This is an entirely new experience for me. I admitted. What about all of you?”

“We’ve had our share of encounters,” Fiona replied. “But every investigation is unique. This one, so far, is the best we have ever had. Intelligent answers to our questions. Doors slamming shut in our presence. It’s fantastic.”

Tom looked at me. His face betrayed an ominous thought. “How about a sensory deprivation session?” he suggested. “As the response with the spirit box was so good, I feel the spirits are eager to communicate with you.”

Fiona looked at me. “It might heighten your experience.”

“What’s involved?” I inquired, curiosity taking hold, despite my reservations.

“As the sceptic, we’d sit you in a room alone and blindfolded. Headphones are connected to the spirit box. This isolates you from our questions and any external noise. I won’t lie, it’s intense. People often report feeling a presence or even physical contact during the session,” Tom detailed.

“Alright, I’m game. Let’s see what happens,” I consented, a mixture of apprehension and intrigue coursing through me.

“Excellent! Let’s get everything set up. Fiona, will you assist Carl, please? I need to fetch some more batteries from the van.”

I offered to go fetch them while they set the apparatus up. I hurried out to the van, returning swiftly with a handful of AA batteries. The four of us stood on the first floor outside the room where the door had previously slammed shut and rattled violently within its frame. As I stood in the ominous space of the corridor, I couldn’t help but wonder what awaited us over the next few hours. Would this experience sway my scepticism, or would it reinforce my disbelief? Only time would tell. I realised I was no longer certain of what I might or might not believe.