

INVESTIGATION REPORT



Investigation Site

Gubblecote

Investigation Date

Friday 15th May 2015

Report By

Bill

Team Members

Bill, Steph, Andy F, Andy G, Elaine, Dee, Sarah

Background

In August of 1751 Thomas Colley was hung at Gubblecote Cross for his part in the murder of Ruth Osborne.

John Butterfield had been a dairyman and Ruth had come to him asking for buttermilk. John had to refuse her request as he needed all the milk he had for his pigs but Ruth did not take the refusal very well. Shortly after this John fell ill with what appears to have been a form of epilepsy, then his calves started to fall ill. John believed that Ruth had cursed him over the buttermilk and he even consulted a wise woman from Northamptonshire who gave him charms but they had little effect. From that day on John bore a grudge against Ruth.

John incited the locals against Ruth and it was announced that there would be a public ducking on a Monday in April which would take place at Tring. Mr Burton the overseer of the poor at Tring heard the announcement being made and found that the accused were two innocent people he knew well. For their own safety he took Ruth and her husband John Osborne into the workhouse for protection. On April 22nd a huge riotous mob arrived who began smashing the workhouse windows and battering the walls. The Osbornes were smuggled out and locked in the church for safety.

The rioters, led by Thomas Colley, a chimney sweep, stormed into the workhouse and ransacked it in their search. When they could not find the Osbornes they threatened to burn the workhouse down. Eventually they forced the master of the workhouse to reveal where John and Ruth were.

The Osbornes were dragged off to the pond at Long Marston where they were stripped naked and had their thumbs and big toes tied together. They were then wrapped in sheets and thrown three times into the water to see if they would sink or swim. Swimming a witch was a recognised test as it was believed that a witch could not sink. The death penalty for witchcraft may have been abolished in 1735 but in country areas old beliefs die hard.

When Ruth was thrown in she appeared to float so Thomas Colley kept pushing her under the water with a stick every time she struggled up for air. Ruth was left on the bank of the pond in her wet sheet while the mob ducked her husband then they dragged her across the pond again with a rope. All this was too much for a couple in their seventies and Ruth died. A doctor who examined her said she had died partly by being suffocated by mud and water and partly through exposure. Her husband was taken to a nearby house but he too died soon afterwards.

Thomas Colley was very pleased with his days' work and even took a collection from the crowd but justice soon caught up with him. As the self-styled ring leader he was arrested, tried at Hertford assizes and sentenced to be hanged.

On August 23rd 1751 Colley left Hertford escorted by one hundred and eight men of the Royal Regiment of Horse Guards. On the 24th he reached Gubblecote Cross where he was duly hung and his body left in chains for many years afterwards as a warning. Many people believed that Ruth was a witch and that the justice meted out to Thomas Colley was hard on a man who had rid the community of a witch.

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Afterwards no one would linger near Thomas Colley's gibbet after dark so the site developed a sinister reputation. Some people said that it was haunted by a large black dog with burning eyes. This was a huge dog, black as a sweep, which was Thomas' profession.

One night a local schoolmaster was returning home in a gig with another person when he encountered the dog. 'When we came near the spot where a portion of the gibbet had lately stood, we saw on the bank of the roadside a flame of fire as large as a man's hat. "What's that?" I exclaimed. "Hush!" said my companion and suddenly pulling in his horse, made a dead stop. I then saw an immense black dog just in front of our horse, the strangest looking creature I ever beheld. He was as big as a Newfoundland, but very gaunt, shaggy with long ears and tail, eyes like balls of fire and large, long teeth for he opened his mouth and seemed to grin at us. In a few minutes the dog disappeared seeming to vanish like a shadow or to sink into the earth and we drove over the spot where he had lain.'

Bill's Report

For this investigation the team met up just to the east of an industrial area which lies close to the west end of Lukes Lane. After a brief chat it was decided to do a walking tour of possible sites where the events associated with the haunting could have occurred. From the parking area we walked along the road to the east until we reached the entrance to a footpath that runs southwest from the road towards Gubblecote Farm. This area has a small footbridge that crosses a stream and is a possible site for the gallows. After a brief investigation of the area we followed the path to the south-southwest. The first field we crossed had a large moat in it so we took a detour to take a look before continuing along the path. The next field was full of young bullocks who turned out to be highly inquisitive and followed us closely as we crossed the field, so close that they were within a metre of Bill who had hung back to make sure they didn't get too close to Steph and Elaine (Andy F, Andy G, Dee and Sarah were in a second group that came up behind the bullocks later). After going through a gate we stood looking at the bullocks when a badger was spotted trotting along the path from the southwest towards us. It got within 30 metres before it spotted us and dived into the nearby hedgerow.

We continued to follow the path until we reached Wingrave Road at a T junction with a road that leads you towards Wilstone. We followed this road until we reached the first junction on the right. At this point the road sweeps round to the left heading south to cross the Aylesbury Arm of the Grand Union Canal. We had planned to take the right turn but during the walk Bill had talked about the area and mentioned a public house in Wilstone, The Half Moon, which has a connection to the story and several team members expressed a desire to see the pub. The road we had planned to go down has three names on maps Watery Lane, Astrope Lane and Tring Road though only the first two are likely to be correct.

As we crossed the canal bridge Andy F and Elaine said they would investigate the canal instead of walking to the pub (the canal has no connection to the events that happened in 1751). The rest of the team took the relatively short walk to the pub and stood outside discussing the events with which it was connected. We decided to get a drink so we could sit outside the pub and carry on with the discussion. During this time Dee came up with several things with definite relevance to the story.

Returning to the canal we collected Elaine and Andy F then continued on to walk along Watery Lane. We passed the path which leads to College Farm then took the next which leads back to Gubblecote. From there we returned to Lukes Land and the cars.

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Andy F's Report

Equipment List

Digital Camcorder: Sony DCR-SR75E
Digital Voice Recorder: Olympus WS-560M
Ovilus III
EMF meter: K-II
Torch and watch

Vigil 1: Canal Lock

Ovilus III came out with the following words in this order:

Mercury, Jackie, Supper, Loose, Burn, Oar, Lens, Poltergeist, All, Memory, Veronica and Grey.

21:56 Andy is talking about photographs and the Ovilus III comes out with the word *Memory*.

Post-Investigation Analysis

Possible Names: Veronica Grey, Jackie Mercury

Possible Sentence: Jackie Mercury Burn Lens Supper

Possible Sentence: Loose Memory Oar Poltergeist Veronica Grey

21:41 Footsteps heard on bridge but by the time the team got to the top of the bridge there was no one around. However given the time it took for the team to get up there anyone would have gone - Debunked

21:45 A young man from under the bridge scaring Elaine and was spoken to by the team - Debunked as not paranormal.

No paranormal activity recorded on audio, film or photographs

Andy G's Report

Unfortunately not much to report from my end as hay fever took hold for most of the evening. Only a couple of bits really happened for me. As we crossed the small stream I had a real sense of confusion and felt very unsteady on my feet. Just after we crossed the cow field, about half way along the path there was a spike on the EMF of 2.8. Nothing was found that would have caused it. Lastly as we all stood around 'Gubblecote Cross' I could see a dark shadow of a man walking left to right and then back again in the car park of the house on the corner.

Elaine's Report

Andy and Elaine decide to stay by the canal as the other members went for a walk further down the lane.

Elaine sits on the bench by the canal and Andy does a vigil under the bridge.

21:23 Elaine picks up the name *Edward*.

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21:25 Elaine has place her note pad and pen on the bench to her right, as she was looking to her left the note pad falls on the floor. There was no wind and the note pad was not hanging over the edge.

Andy and Elaine decided to investigate by the canal lock.

21:37 Elaine starts to feel uneasy.

Andy and Elaine move to the other side of the bridge.

21:39 Elaine has a tingling feeling on the left side of her face.

21:41 Andy and Elaine both hear footsteps on the bridge and go to investigate, by the time we had got to the top of the bridge no one was seen, but they could have gone into the house on the corner.

21:43 As Elaine turns to her right she sees a young man in a grey top walking towards them which made Elaine jump. He walked off laughing.

21:45 As Andy was putting his equipment down Ovilus III comes out with the word *Oar*.

21:47 Elaine and Andy move to the bench on the other side of the bridge. Ovilus III comes out with the word *Lens*.

21:51 As Andy was saying how interesting the bridge was Ovilus III comes out with the word *Poltergeist*. Elaine mentions to Andy that she felt uneasy earlier while sitting on the bench.

21:53 Ovilus III says *All*.

21:56 Elaine asks if anyone can make the lights move and Ovilus III says *Memories*.

21:58 Andy was using his camcorder and asks "You can see my arm moving try and get yourself in the picture". Olivus III comes out with the name *Veronica*.

22:00 The other team members come back and Elaine goes to tell them that they are doing a vigil. Andy soon joins us and asks Elaine to see what Ovilus III had said which was *Gray*.

The rest of the Investigation Elaine did not pick up on anything.

Equipment List

Digital Camera: Samsung W100 Bridge

Digital Voice Recorder: Olympus VN-731PC