

Investigation Report



Investigation Site

Happisburgh Norfolk

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Report By

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The terrifying tale of the hump-backed Happisburgh Torso, the ghost whose head trailed behind it and the LPS Investigation that followed it.

Background

The grisly tale of Happisburgh Torso – the ghost of a sailor without legs and with a head trailing behind him on a thin strip of flesh – is one told next to roaring fires and on dark and stormy nights and which still has the power to terrify today. CAUTION: not for the faint-hearted!

The date differs when it comes to accounts of the horrifying Happisburgh Torso, but the details remain the same: a ghostly shape materialising in the dark, the awful realisation that the figure drawing closer has no legs and then the even more dreadful discovery that the creature's head is dangling down its back attached only by a thin strip of flesh.

One story says that Happisburgh's macabre cadaver was first seen in 1765, others that it wasn't spotted until the 1890s but regardless of the timeline, the spectre is linked to an argument between Dutch smugglers on the beach at nearby Cart Gap, an argument that ended in gunfire and bloodshed.

Also known as the Pump Hill Ghost, on account of the destination for the dreadful creature, the disembodied torso was said to be wearing sailor's clothing and grasping a large brown sack to its heart as it made its way purposefully from the beach to the triangular spot between what is now Whimpwell Street, Whimpwell Green and Coronation Road, where there was once a well.

First seen by farmers who were walking home after a day's work on the fields, the ghost was spotted moving from the direction of Cart Gap towards Happisburgh village - at first, the farmers thought the creature was hump-backed, until with horror they realise the hump was actually the torso's almost-severed head bouncing behind it as it made its way towards the triangle of land, a long plait hanging from the head, almost touching the ground. Terrified, the farmers told others what they had seen and soon, reports began to circulate about the awful apparition as others came forward with their terrible tales.

One night, a brave soul set out to follow the ghost on its journey to see where it would travel to - gingerly tracing the spectre's route, the man watched as the other-worldly creature lurched towards the village well at which point it launched the sack it carried, and then itself, into the well.

The next day, the decision was taken to search the well: villagers watched in trepidation as a slight young man was lowered in the bucket, down into the deep, dark well until he hit the bottom with a splash. There, as he nervously felt around in the water, and came across a rough brown sack (other accounts claim it was a grappling hook and not a man who found the sacks, but we prefer to think of a terrified villager reaching out in the dark). Inside the sack were a pair of sailor's boots: and inside the boots, were a pair of sailor's legs.

Horrified, the decision was made to immediately drain the well - suddenly the village didn't feel thirsty - and see if there were any more macabre discoveries to be made at the bottom of the well: there were. Another sack contained a torso in a traditional sailor's uniform, a strip of rotting flesh connecting a grinning skull to the body, and a belt with a pistol hanging from it.

On moonlit nights, it was said that terrible moaning could be heard ringing out from the well and that before storms the ghost would groan - but when a new-fangled pump was installed at the well the ghostly goings-on came to an abrupt stop. Until the pump was removed, at which point the groaning began once again.

Fearful that the Happisburgh Torso would begin its dreadful coastal journey once again, the pump was quickly reinstalled, but the well fell into disuse in the 20th century, although villagers were unwilling to decommission the pump in case the ghost made an unwelcome return.

Today the area where the Happisburgh Torso, said by some to be a story invented by smugglers to keep villagers in their homes at night, bears no sign that there was ever a well on the spot - but if you listen closely on dark and stormy nights.

Ambient conditions.

Dry and sunny with clear blue skies

The odd car going past and the odd local stopping for a talk.

Pre-Investigation – Local Research.

Research undertaken with some of the locals and special thanks to Sue the landlady of the local pub called the Hill house Inn who not only confirmed the story but also showed me extensive photographs from the village history. Sue also walked with me to where she thought the location of the old village well was (which differs from an account for its location online see picture below) and which was now covered up by a bush in a private garden in a nearby house. Not only was Sue very helpful with my research but the staff were all very friendly and the meal and choice of ciders made for an excellent part of the research process for which I am thankful and would recommend anyone visiting Happisburgh to visit the Hill House Inn.

The Investigation Begins.

Even while on holiday in Happisburgh like any sane paranormal investigator or should that read insane. Is going to resist investigating a ghost story right on the doorstep. So, with a nice warm sunny evening I set off down the lane where the ghost was said to walk, starting with the location of the village well and down Whimpwell Street, Whimpwell Green and Coronation Road, where there was once a well according to internet sources.



The purpose of this journey was to cover both sides of the story which at the time of writing remain unclear. The walk was very interesting in the fact it was early evening, and it gave a good view of the nearby Happsiburgh Light house. Upon reaching the triangular spot mentioned as the location by a local reporter I took numerous photographs. The location here was quiet. and try as I might I could find no evidence in the ground that there was ever a well or another remains at this location which in my opinion was some distance outside of the village.

Therefore, going on local knowledge as compared to the internet I returned to the village centre having not seen any evidence of this terrifying spectre form folklore. However, that is not to say it did now exist or was it really a smugglers tale to keep people from straying outdoors at night we will never know