

A black and white photograph of a misty forest path. The path is narrow and leads into the distance, flanked by trees with bare branches. The ground is covered in fallen leaves and some low-lying vegetation. In the lower-left foreground, a ghostly, white, hooded figure stands on the path, looking towards the viewer. The overall atmosphere is eerie and mysterious.

The Haunted Borough

The Ghosts that Haunt Basildon Borough

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Most towns and villages across the country will have their ghost stories, and those that make up Basildon Borough are no different.

With many of the older buildings in the Borough disappearing as the New Town grew a lot of the stories that surrounded them may have gone with them.

Whether there is any truth to these tales or not, and if you believe them or not, these stories add a bit of colour to the history of the area. They may even hint at true events that have become embellished over the years.

Around 2010 one local resident was walking towards the Festival Leisure Park and saw a lad in front of her as she approached the underpass. When she looked down the boy had disappeared, with no way that he could have got up the steps or slopes at the other end.

Further enquires revealed that he matched the description of someone that had been killed when attempting to cross Cranes Farm Road.



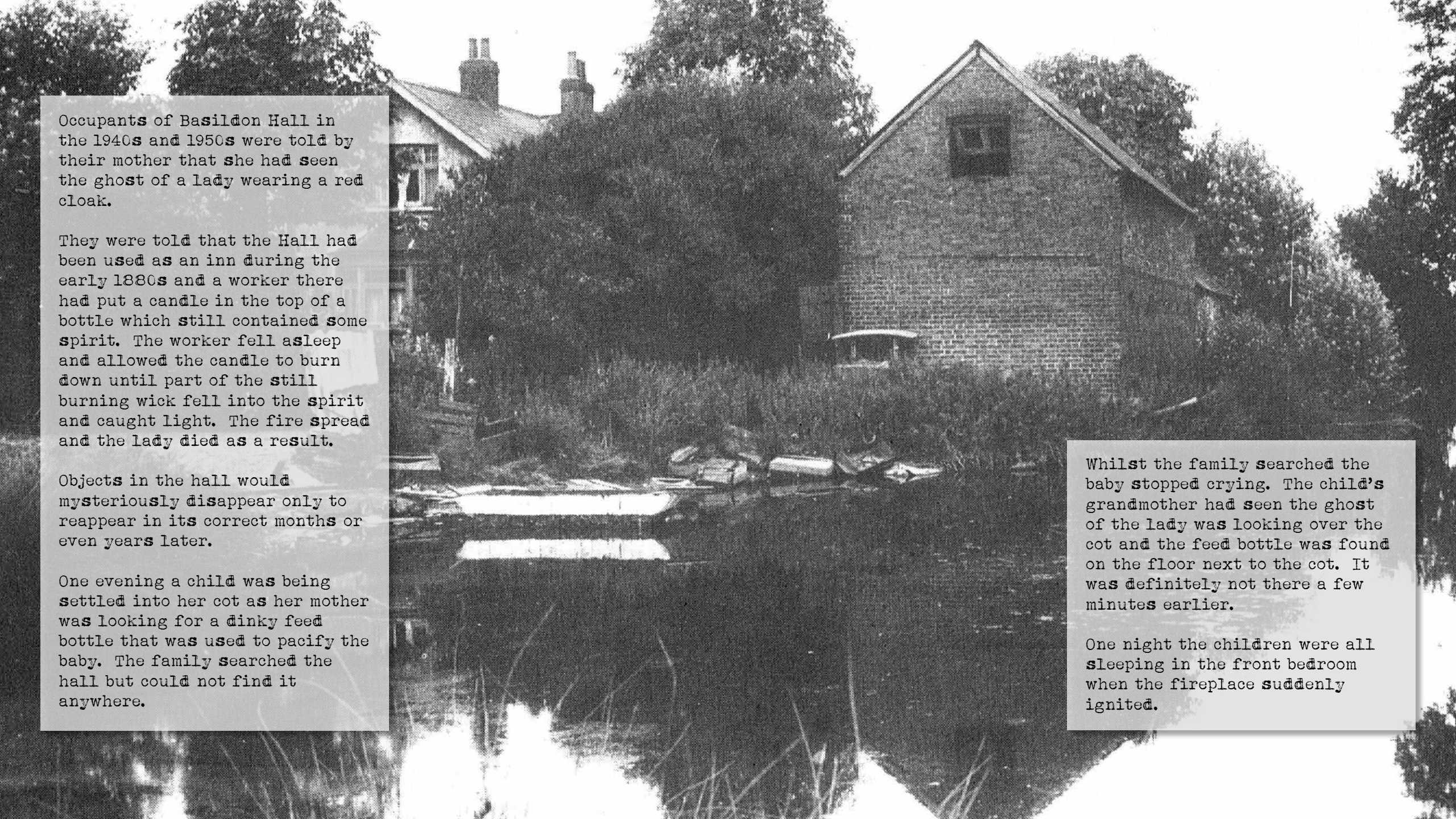
Basildon



One of the new builds, Basildon Hospital, had some unexplained goings-on in the 1980's. Lights would come on in a ward and had to be turned off. The ward was unused and the doors were chained and padlocked. The ward was repeatedly searched but no one was ever found.

Nurses reported hearing someone coughing very loudly in a toilet, followed by the sound of running water after the coughing had stopped. On inspection there was no one in the toilet and no taps had been turned on.





Occupants of Basilton Hall in the 1940s and 1950s were told by their mother that she had seen the ghost of a lady wearing a red cloak.

They were told that the Hall had been used as an inn during the early 1880s and a worker there had put a candle in the top of a bottle which still contained some spirit. The worker fell asleep and allowed the candle to burn down until part of the still burning wick fell into the spirit and caught light. The fire spread and the lady died as a result.

Objects in the hall would mysteriously disappear only to reappear in its correct months or even years later.

One evening a child was being settled into her cot as her mother was looking for a dinky feed bottle that was used to pacify the baby. The family searched the hall but could not find it anywhere.

Whilst the family searched the baby stopped crying. The child's grandmother had seen the ghost of the lady was looking over the cot and the feed bottle was found on the floor next to the cot. It was definitely not there a few minutes earlier.

One night the children were all sleeping in the front bedroom when the fireplace suddenly ignited.

Reports of women seeing a red monk walking through the mist on Church Lane as it headed in to the churchyard attracted the press in to the area in February 1964.

The monk was seen between 4am and 6am and one witness even cycled through him.

Bernard Lloyd, reverend at the time, had heard footsteps in the porch and received a report from a worried caller who had heard the 'clink of spades' in the graveyard. When they went to the church to investigate they couldn't find anything to explain it.

Some years later it was claimed that a few friends had faked the spectre using a projector against the fog.

When James was at school in the 1990's the stories of the monk were still being told.





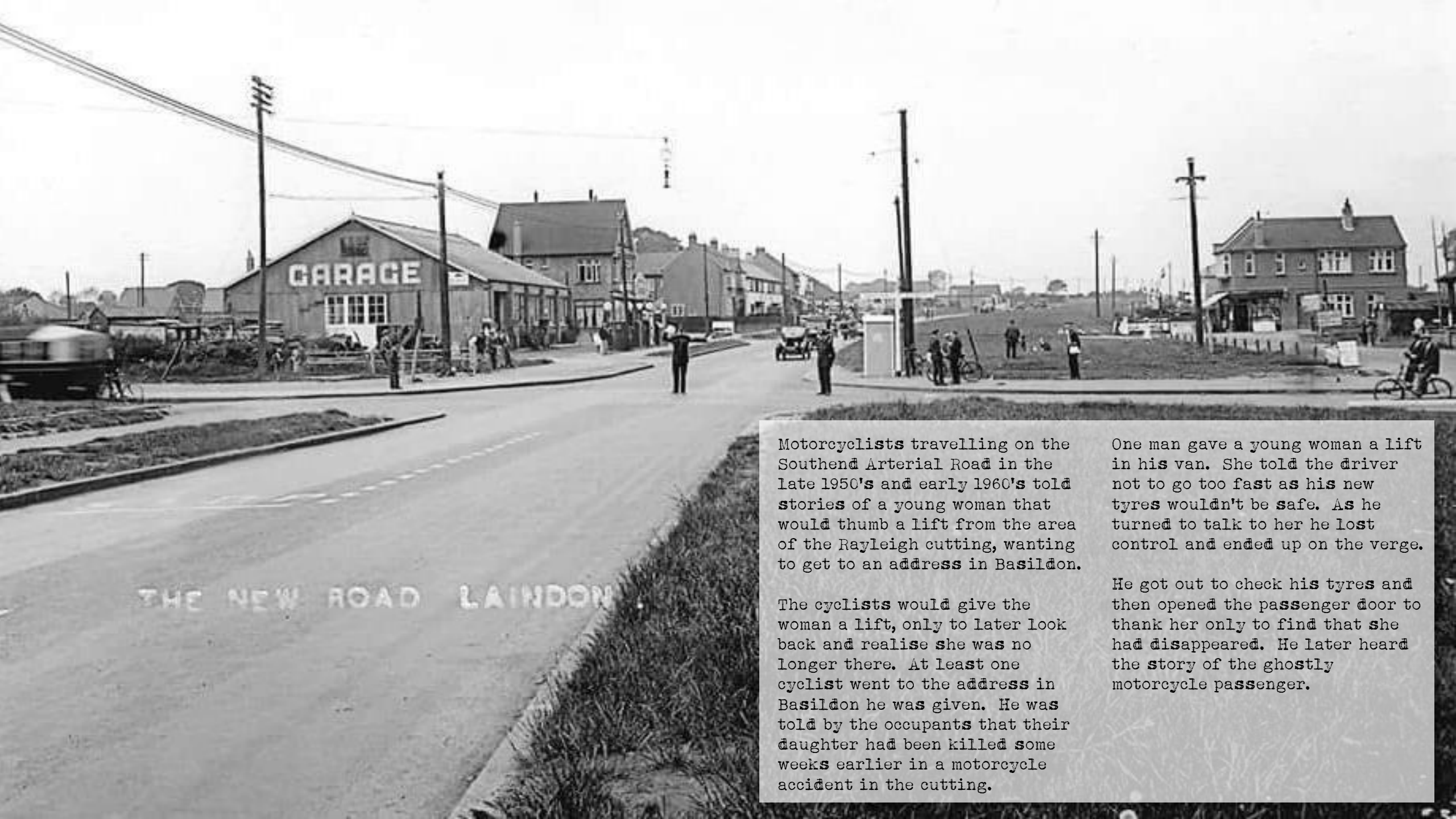
Church Road was also said to be haunted.

The apparition of a small girl, allegedly killed by a horse and cart, was said to frequent the area.

There is also a tale of four horses pulling a coach, driven by a headless coachman, that was said to speed down Church Road.



A barn near Fryerns Farm was said to be haunted by the ghost of a person that hung themselves there.



Motorcyclists travelling on the Southend Arterial Road in the late 1950's and early 1960's told stories of a young woman that would thumb a lift from the area of the Rayleigh cutting, wanting to get to an address in Basildon.

The cyclists would give the woman a lift, only to later look back and realise she was no longer there. At least one cyclist went to the address in Basildon he was given. He was told by the occupants that their daughter had been killed some weeks earlier in a motorcycle accident in the cutting.

One man gave a young woman a lift in his van. She told the driver not to go too fast as his new tyres wouldn't be safe. As he turned to talk to her he lost control and ended up on the verge.

He got out to check his tyres and then opened the passenger door to thank her only to find that she had disappeared. He later heard the story of the ghostly motorcycle passenger.

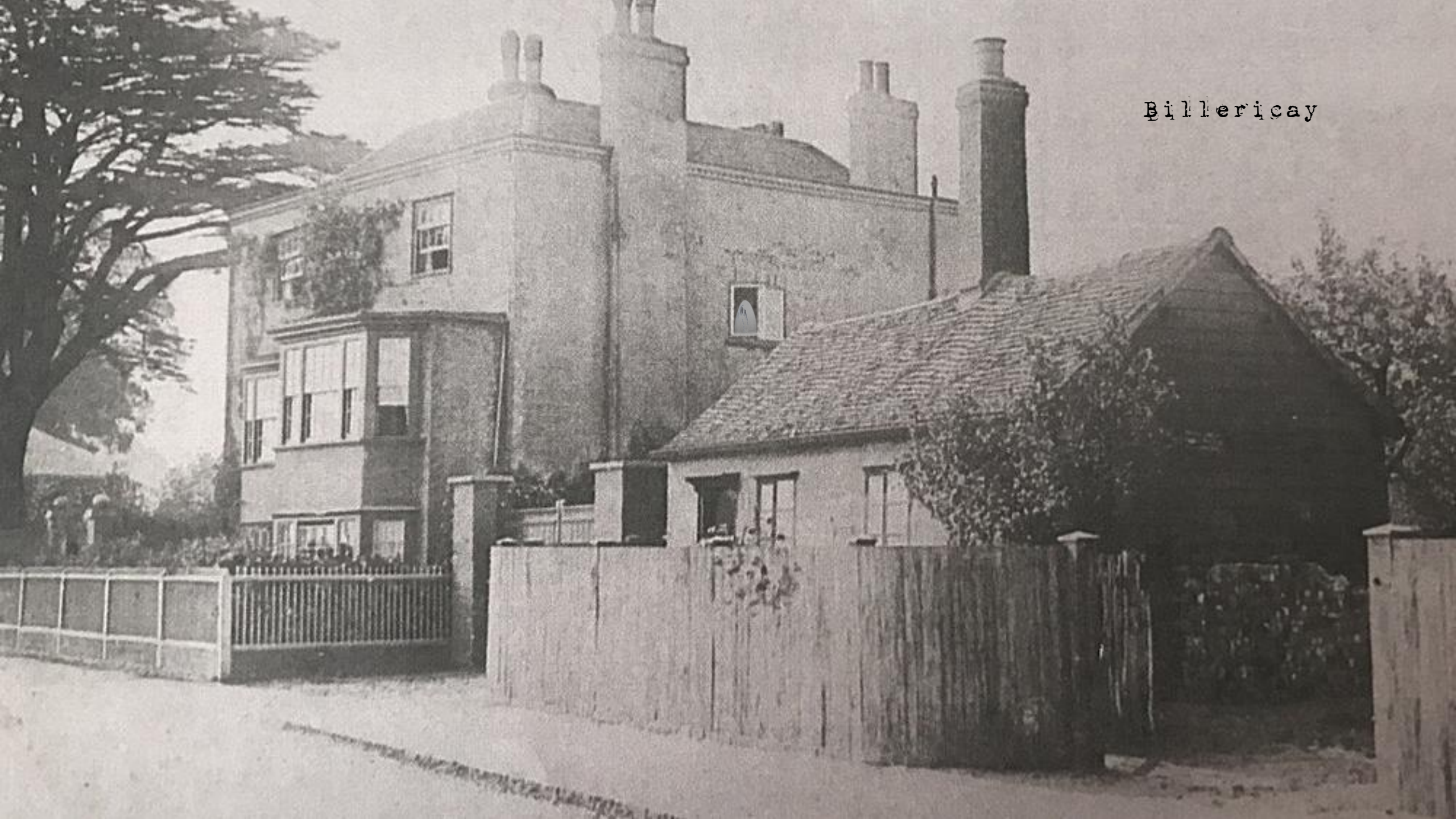


During the 1960's the 17th Alley of the Ambassador Bowling Club was said to be haunted.

A figure wearing blue overalls had been seen on the lane and the machinery was said to be erratic.

Someone working in the club after hours had heard the machinery on the lane start working even though there was no one else in the building.

Billerica



Billericay Police Station was built in 1938. It pre-dates the New Town but is one of the younger buildings in Billericay. An Inspector based there in 1976 was a few days away from retiring when he was called to a burglary. The car he was in was hit whilst travelling to the burglary (which was a false alarm). The Inspector rescued the officer driving the car before collapsing. He later died in hospital.

Since then, the Inspector has been blamed for any odd occurrences in the Police Station. A Police Community Support Officer was sitting alone in the station waiting for a lift when a stapler went flying past her. The PCSO fled to the safety of the car park and refused to return to the building.

More recently two members of staff were talking in a kitchen when a mug was pushed off a table and smashed on the floor. A few weeks later a cleaner was disturbed by someone moving things in a room, but no one was in there. A few days later a member of staff was greeted with 'morning' as he walked into an empty room.



A former tenant of St Aubyns, a 16th century house in Chapel Street, claimed that the house was haunted.

In 1951, soon after Mr Richman had moved into St Aubyns, a visitor, who was not at all imaginative in this respect, was lying in bed whilst everyone was downstairs. She swore later that she was certain someone was in the room looking at her. At first, she took no notice, as she thought Mr Richman's mother, who shared the room with her, had returned for some purpose or another. There was no movement or sound, so she turned round to see who was there, but the room was empty. Mrs Richman had not been nearby.

In 1956 Mr Richman heard of two different experiences said to be some distance apart and the second person had no idea what had happened to the first, till both were living elsewhere.

The first lived in St Aubyns during the first World War. It was not until she had met a lady who used to live there between the wars who said that she was never so scared in her life as when she lived in the house.

Asked why, she described exactly the same experience which the other lady had had years before.

It was 'just like someone with dragging footsteps and holding on to the wall for support coming from the front room door (not the front door a few feet beyond) along the main passage, then at right angles along the other passage towards the kitchen door' at which point the steps ceased.

She and the other lady, with whom there was no collusion, both said the steps were not to be confused with those of neighbours on either side, which can be heard but only faintly, at times but were quite distinctly in the house itself.

The Richman's did not have this experience but they did hear footsteps very often coming from the front door (not the front room as the other ladies) and sometimes heard the door open and close first. The steps came down the passage and then straight up stairs to the first floor. Once they used to go and look but later, they never bothered but a male friend who frequently visited them made a point of seeing if there was anyone, but there never was.



Mr Richman said his mother also had a very curious experience in the kitchen one evening in 1956 about 10-11pm.

Mr Richman arrived home to find his mother sitting looking intently at the wall opposite. She told him, "I'm just watching the shadow of a ghost!" and asked him to watch the walls after noting there was nothing cooking or boiling on the stove and no tea or other beverage on the table or elsewhere to cause any steam or vapour. After a moment or so they saw a hasty flash of a shadow, almost like that of steam but without any continued existence as it would have been from the shadow of steam from a kettle or other utensil.

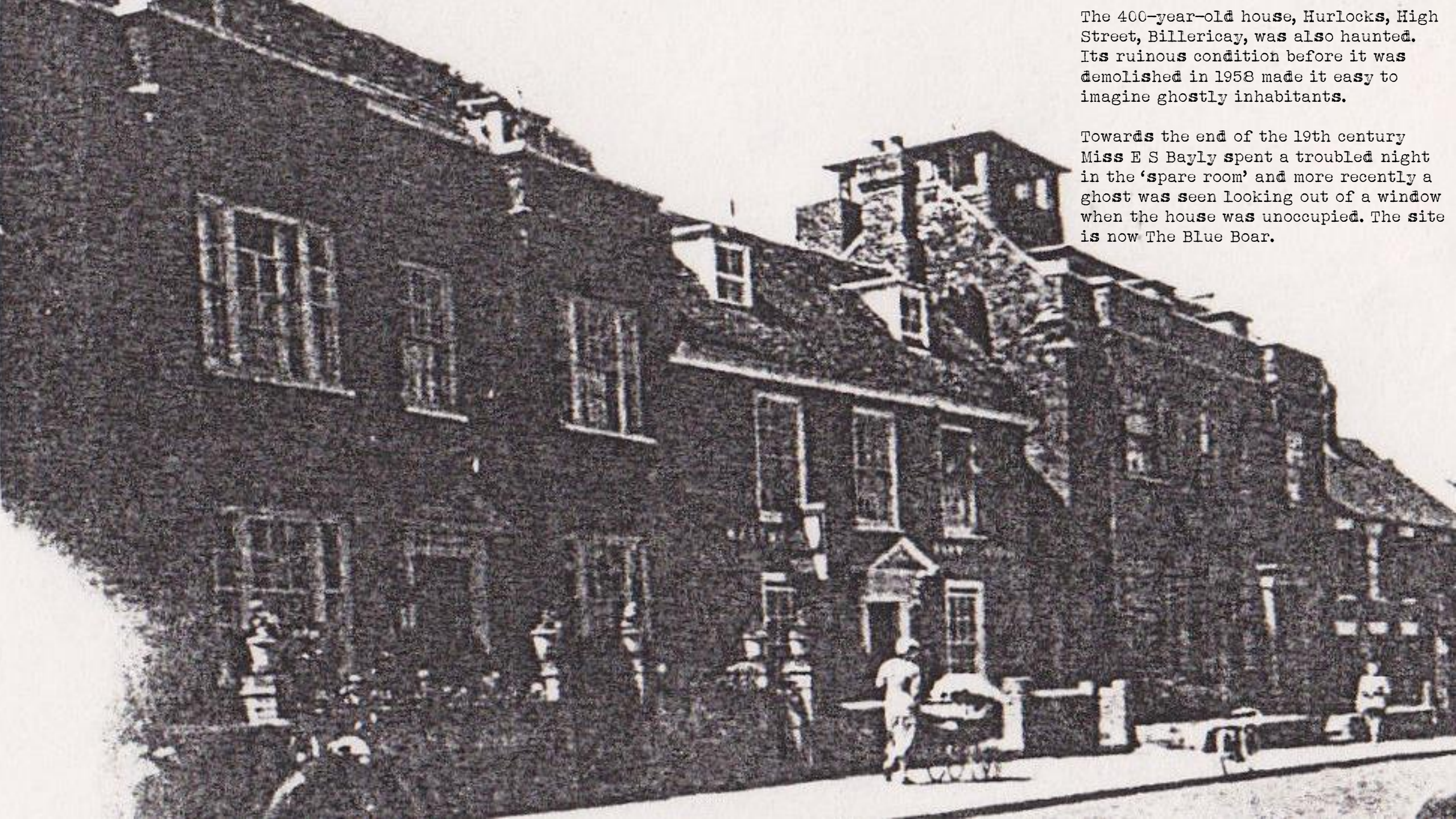
Mr Richman laughingly remarked that it was the ghost of steam from a vessel carried from the old copper, where generations of women have worked. It was just a flash across the chimney breast (there was no fire), followed a few seconds later by the same on the next or inner wall. The shadow passed across a small mirror.



Mother and son tried to repeat the shadow or reflection by means of various objects on the table but without result.

The curtains were drawn and the door was shut and bolted. The next 'shadow' flashed across the door and it was when yet another flash of the same shadow went across the fourth wall and across the white plate at the back of the gas stove, that Mr Richman remembered he had seen exactly the same thing at the same point on a number of occasions about that time of night, but had never really taken much notice of it.

The same 'shadow' was repeated on each wall in turn several times as they watched.



The 400-year-old house, Hurlocks, High Street, Billericay, was also haunted. Its ruinous condition before it was demolished in 1958 made it easy to imagine ghostly inhabitants.

Towards the end of the 19th century Miss E S Bayly spent a troubled night in the 'spare room' and more recently a ghost was seen looking out of a window when the house was unoccupied. The site is now The Blue Boar.



The beautiful Georgian house, Burghstead Lodge, in the High Street, Billericay, has a spine-chilling story told of a haunted bedroom at the back of the building (southwest room, first floor).

The story was recounted by J.A. Sparvel-Bayly, who lived there in the late 1870s and early 1880s. He told how an old retainer in the 19th century was engaged to be a night nurse to a young, unknown gentleman at Burghstead Lodge. He was in a critical condition and was not to be spoken to unless necessary. The house, let to a non-resident nobleman and lived in by members of his family, had little to do with local tradesman.

On the first night, as the nurse sat by the smouldering log fire in the huge fireplace, there were no sounds but the moaning of the wind. At midnight the patient breathed heavily and seemed uneasy and the nurse was surprised to see a lady in a green silk gown with a black veil over her bonnet sitting by the bedhead. The nurse was unalarmed and curtsied and moved towards the bed. However, the lady motioned her to be seated, so the nurse sat and wondered how and when the lady had come in.



It was cold and late for a visitor and she had been told that no visitors came. The lady sat watching the patient and repulsed the nurse when she approached the bed to help the patient, who was very uneasy. At last, the nurse closed her eyes for a moment – the lady had disappeared and the patient was easier banged in the wind. The nurse felt uneasy and somewhat creepy and was thinking that she would give up her engagement, when heavy breathing of her patient made her look up to see the lady in the green gown again seated by his bed.

The nurse thought she must be an inmate of the house, as her dress, the very low bodice summer costume of the period, was quite unsuitable for the inclement weather. When the nurse rose to go to the bed, she waved her back. The patient's agitation, however, so increased that the nurse did approach the bed in spite of the lady's gestures. The lady drew her veil across her face and retired to the window. The patient appeared in agony, with drops of perspiration rolling down his face, while his eyes followed the lady in her glittering gown and he repulsed all the nurses offers of help.



The nurse told the physician in the morning that she could not carry on. He appeared surprised when told about the lady in green and asked the nurse to resume duty for that night, which she agreed to do.

That night she was determined to watch for the lady, but her vigilance was defeated. Weary with watching she raised her head yawning with fatigue and there, with lavishly displayed shoulders, was the lady. The nurse felt awestruck and when she approached the bed the lady retreated.

The young man was cold with terror, his eyes straining from their socket's unconscious of everything but the mysterious lady. Nurse thought he was dying and was going for assistance, when the lady moved to the bed and over the dying man, then moving to the door. The nurse had one hand on the door latch and with the other she tried to raise the lady's veil, but nurse fell senseless to the floor for a death's head filled the large old-fashioned bonnet. A horrid laugh rang out, the lady disappeared and nurse knew no more.

The next morning the nurse was found cold and numb on the floor and the patient appeared to have been for many hours.

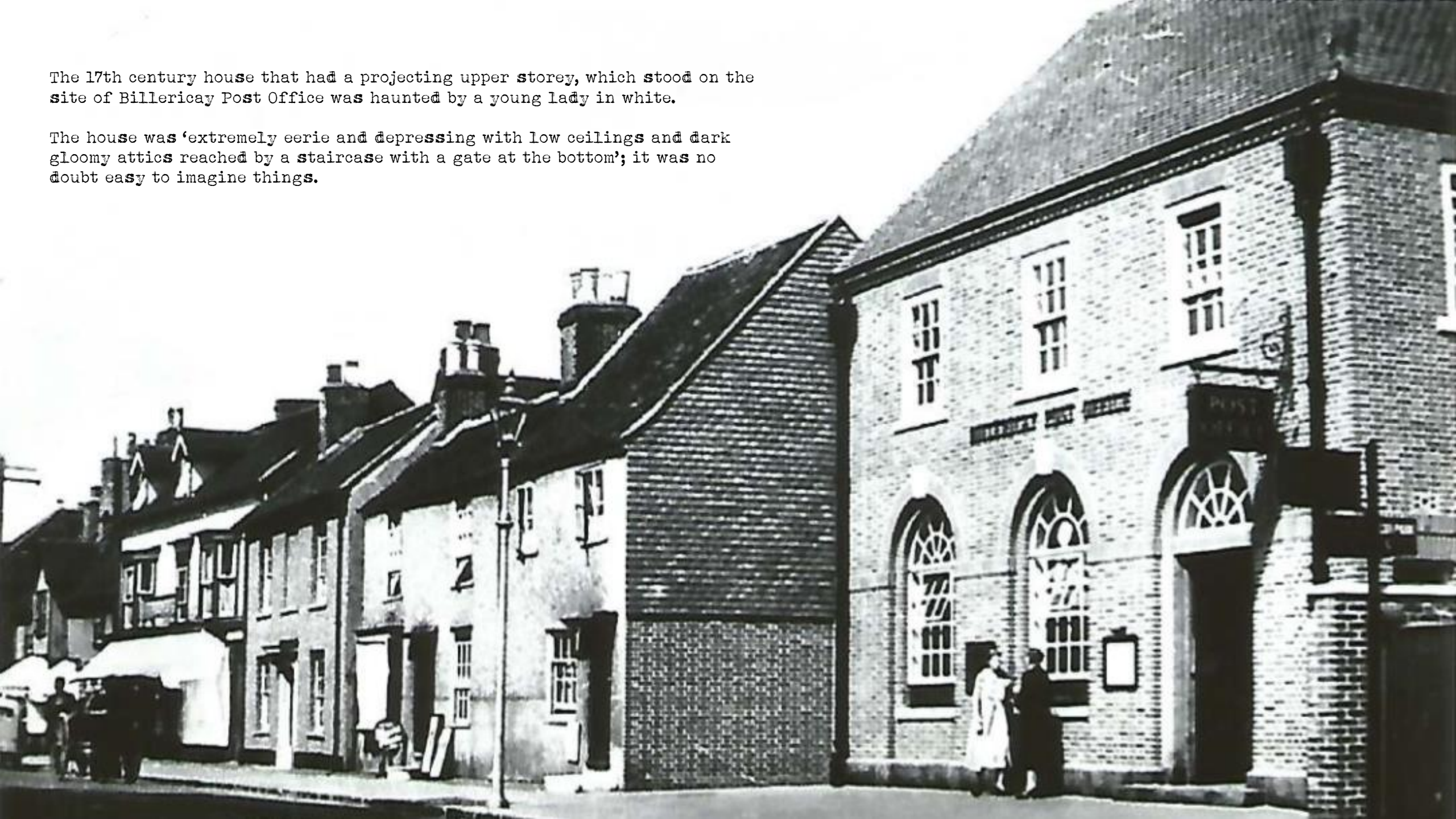
The mysterious young man was buried in the parish church with a lavish funeral. A gentleman whose features bore a striking resemblance to the effigy upon the coin of the realm and a London physician alone followed the body to the grave. A plain and exquisite tablet was placed in the church a year afterwards bearing the words, "Charles Leroy died 29 February, 18—. Remember."

Poor nurse died three months after her dreadful ordeal and the gloomy chamber was said to have a strange feeling of awe and coldness by whoever occupied it afterwards, although nothing was ever seen or heard to alarm the weakest nerves.

Mr Sparvel-Bayly used to point out the haunted room to visitors (especially young ladies), but his daughter said that she and her sisters never saw anything unusual, even when they slept in the room but then Mr Bayly did say that nothing was there to alarm the weakest nerves.

The 17th century house that had a projecting upper storey, which stood on the site of Billericay Post Office was haunted by a young lady in white.

The house was 'extremely eerie and depressing with low ceilings and dark gloomy attics reached by a staircase with a gate at the bottom'; it was no doubt easy to imagine things.



The former Union Workhouse has some ghostly stories to tell. The nearby Grey Lady Place appears to refer to a ghost that has been seen in the Workhouse.

Homeless people were often allowed in to the kitchens to warm up. It suggested that one is responsible for things being moved in this area still.

The buildings have been converted in to apartments. Residents have reported seeing a young girl at the foot of their beds.



Bowers Gifford



St Margaret's is a lonely little church near the railway line some way from the village and it has been said that the organ is heard playing at night when the building is empty.

Many years ago, four boys had heard of the rumour, so they visited the church one summer evening. They took it in turns to sit in the church alone. As one of the boys sat in the dim, silent church, the only living person in the building, the organ began to play. He fled outside to his companions and was very upset for days afterwards.

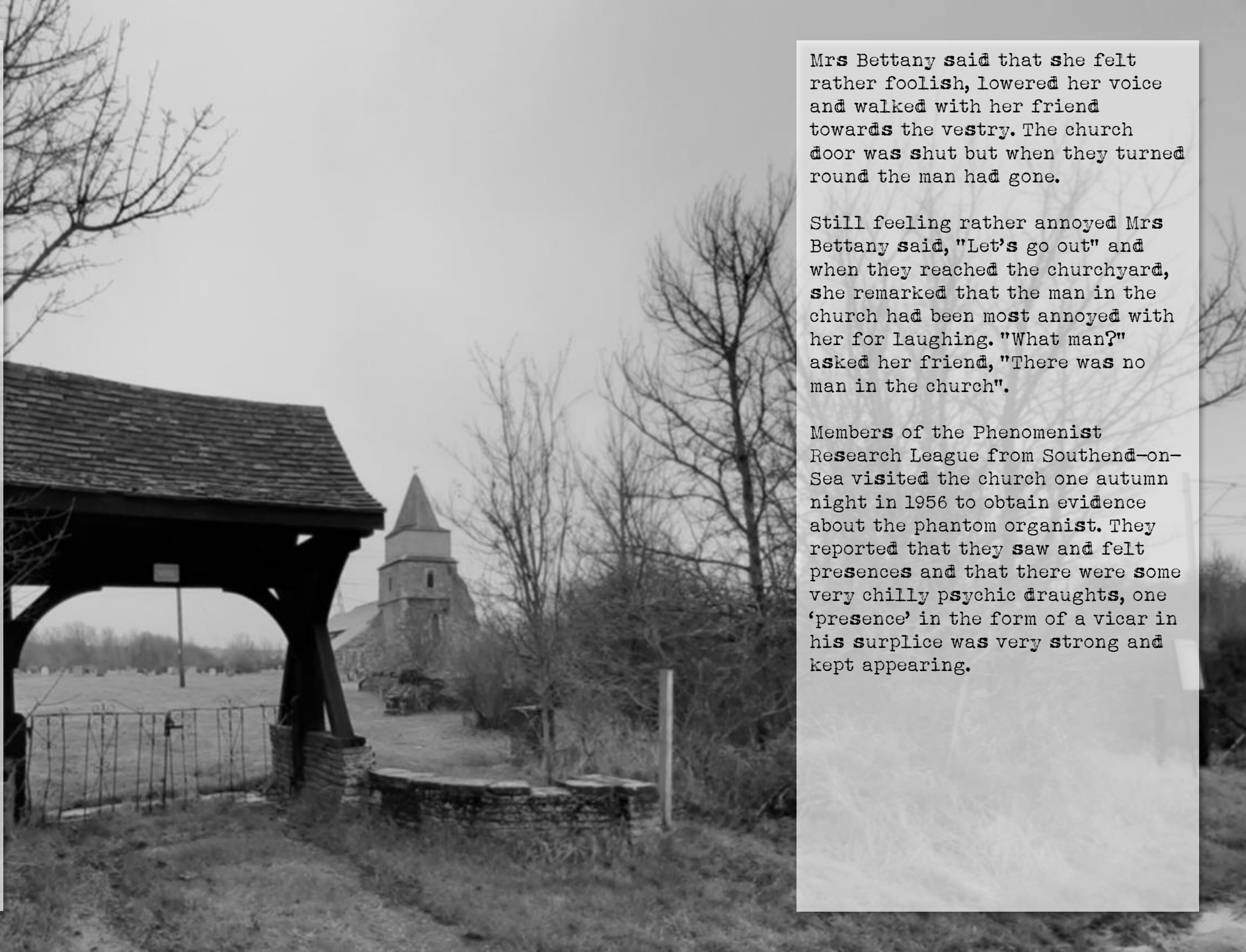
Mrs Bettany of South Benfleet and a friend visited Bowers Gifford church one day. As they entered, Mrs Bettany saw standing two pews down on the south side of the church an old man with short white beard, who looked like a clergyman.

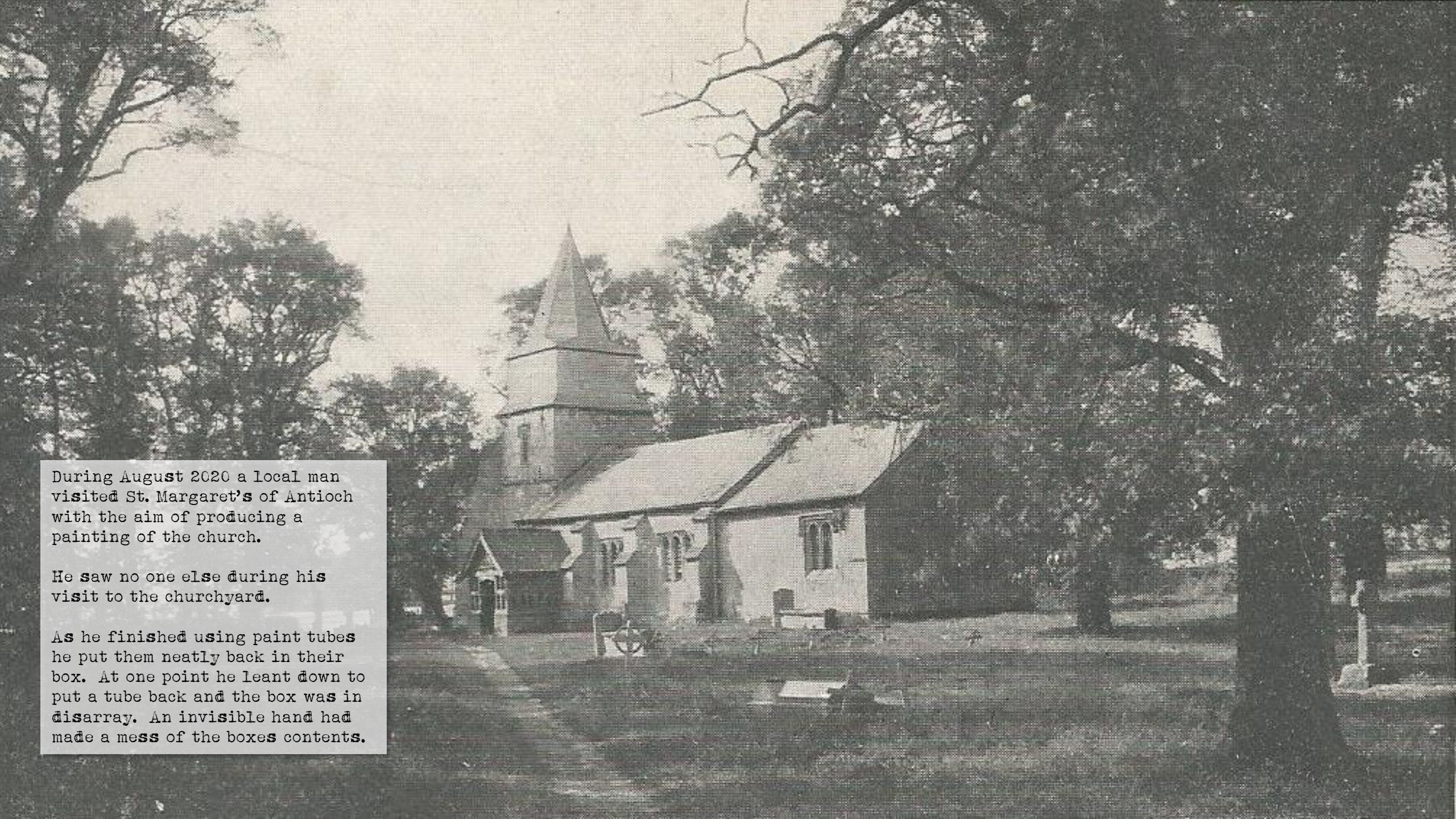
She was laughing at something that had amused her and the old man glared at her and looked as if he was extremely angry that she should behave thus in the holy edifice.

Mrs Bettany said that she felt rather foolish, lowered her voice and walked with her friend towards the vestry. The church door was shut but when they turned round the man had gone.

Still feeling rather annoyed Mrs Bettany said, "Let's go out" and when they reached the churchyard, she remarked that the man in the church had been most annoyed with her for laughing. "What man?" asked her friend, "There was no man in the church".

Members of the Phenomenist Research League from Southend-on-Sea visited the church one autumn night in 1956 to obtain evidence about the phantom organist. They reported that they saw and felt presences and that there were some very chilly psychic draughts, one 'presence' in the form of a vicar in his surplice was very strong and kept appearing.





During August 2020 a local man visited St. Margaret's of Antioch with the aim of producing a painting of the church.

He saw no one else during his visit to the churchyard.

As he finished using paint tubes he put them neatly back in their box. At one point he leant down to put a tube back and the box was in disarray. An invisible hand had made a mess of the boxes contents.

Crays Hill

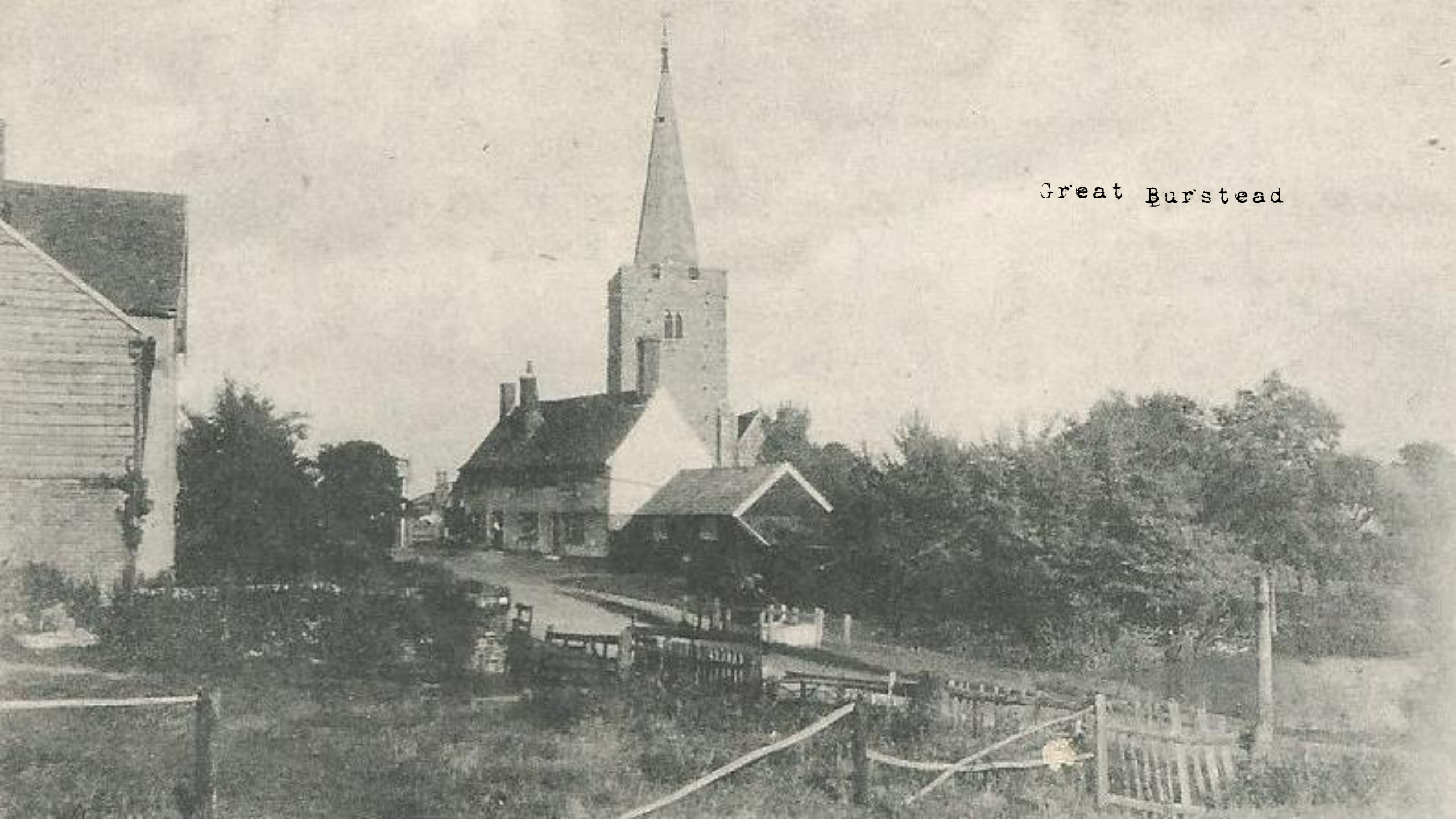




Crays Hill is alleged to have had
gallows in the village.

The area is also said to be haunted by
a boy dressed in white.

Great Burstead

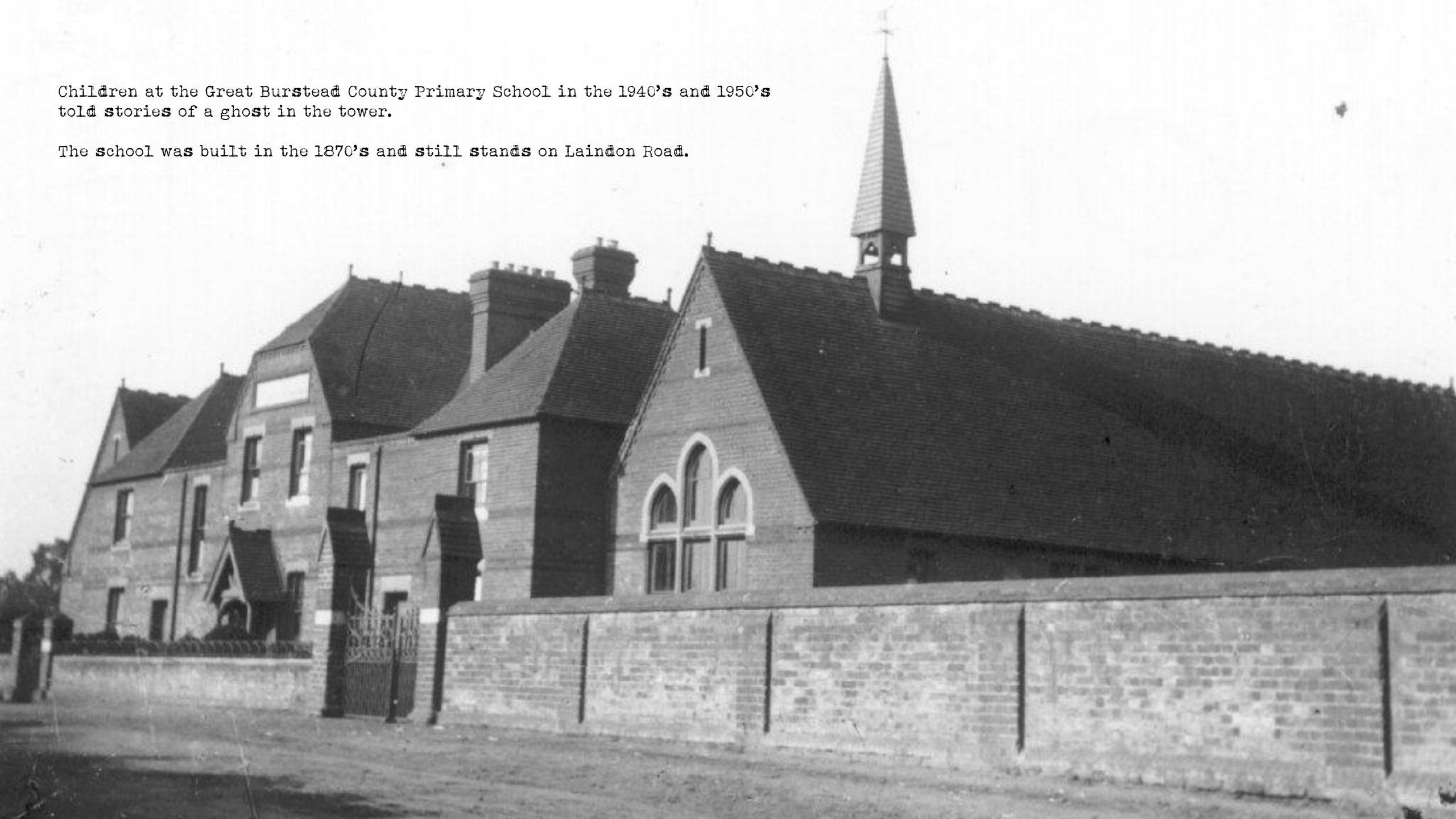





A ghostly horse and carriage are said to haunt Bell Hill after a crash killed the horse and passengers.

Children at the Great Burstead County Primary School in the 1940's and 1950's told stories of a ghost in the tower.

The school was built in the 1870's and still stands on Laindon Road.





Laindon



Workers at a printers on Laindon High Road during the 1970's refused to work night shifts, as they were terrified of the poltergeist that inhabited the building.

The printers was based in the original Fortune of War Public House. The original Fortune of War was built during the early part of the 1800's, with the current building dating from the early 1900's.

One former member of staff remembered hearing footsteps walking around the building and into a room with only one door. When the room was checked no one was there.

Boxes in a store room were thrown from the back of a shelf and across the room. The witness states that they were not stacked very high and at the back of a deep shelf, so could not have fallen.

During the late 1990's some children claimed to have seen a woman, dressed in the uniform of a lollipop lady, crying, near where they lived. The woman then vanished before them.



St. Nicholas Church is said to be home to a ghost that attends every wedding there. The story says that she was married in the church long ago, but fell down the stairs and broke her neck as she left with her new husband.





The Shuck is said to be a demonic animal, like a large black dog with glowing red eyes, that is often seen across Anglia, but there are reports as far south as Basildon.

A large black animal has been reported in Billericay and Pitsea on separate occasions. Another large animal, around 5 feet high but resembling a dog, has been seen walking from Vange towards Fobbing.

A few years later and another Shuck was seen at St Nicholas Church in Laindon. A group of teens were sitting in a field when they were disturbed by a screeching noise in the bushes, which they took to be the prey of a fox. What they actually saw was a huge black dog with glowing eyes that began to growl at them.

Langdon Hills





Goldsmiths Manor is not actually within the borough of Basildon, though it is in the old parish of Langdon Hills, was the country seat of Sir Joseph Dimsdale, Lord Mayor of London in 1901-2.

The original house was built in the 18th century but on either side are modern additions by Sir Joseph.

In three of the ancient attics, once the sleeping place of maidservants, strange tappings are heard and ghostly footsteps have also been heard on the stairs at night. One lady who slept in the attic at the head of the stairs heard these noises and felt such a horrible atmosphere that she had to get up in the night and put her head out of the window.

A guest asked if her host had to go out one night as she heard footsteps on the stairs but no one had been on the stairs that night.

One misty night the lady of the house was on her own as her husband was in Paris and it was too foggy for him to fly home.

On coming into the hall in the old part of the building from the kitchen with a cup of tea on a tray she noticed a lady standing to one side of the hall.

She wondered vaguely how she had got there and noticed that she wore no outdoor clothes, although it was such an inclement night. As she was going to ask what she wanted the women vanished before her eyes. Feeling very shocked she managed to walk into the sitting room and put the tray down but her pet pug dog began to howl, and kept howling.

That evening she went to friend's house and they commented that she 'looked as if she had seen a ghost'. "As a matter of fact, I have", she replied and told them of her experience.

On describing the ghostly lady's appearance and clothes, she wore a beige tucked dress, her friend's husband said the description fitted a former inhabitant of Goldsmiths.

Not far from Goldsmiths stood, until 1933 when it was destroyed by fire, the ancient timber farmhouse of Northlands, which was probably 300 years old.

Its kitchen had a most uncanny atmosphere and a door in it was reported, by an old resident, that they had often seen it open by some invisible agency.

Blood stains on the floorboards in another part of the house were said to come from a man who had committed suicide. Could this be our invisible agent?



Little Burstead





According to a report in the local press on Christmas Day 1951, Mr B Murray of the Tower House Preparatory School, Little Burstead, otherwise known as Hope House, heard the ship's bell peal at noon while no one was in the house.

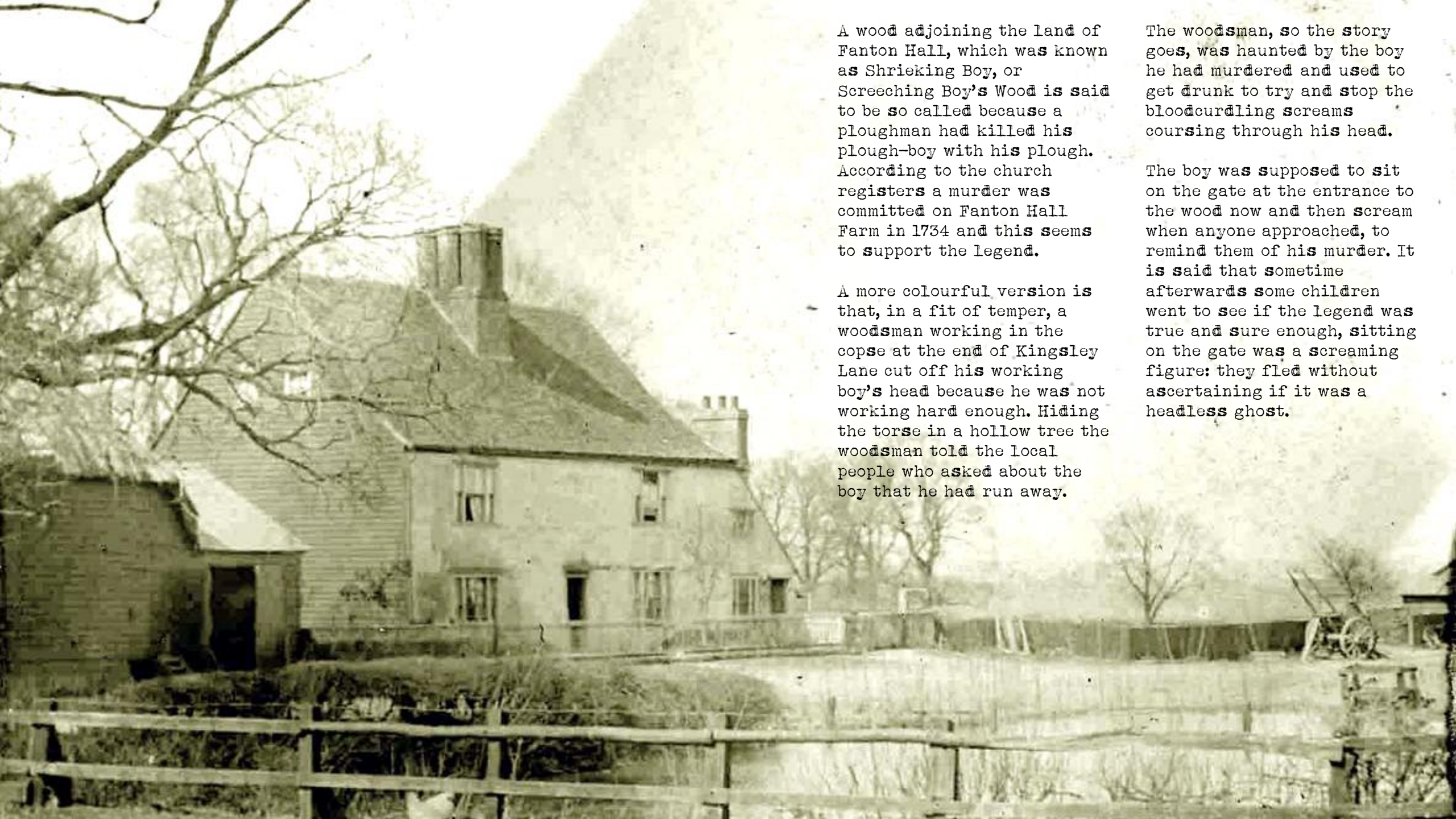
A few days later he heard noises of 'walking about outside', but there was no one in sight.

A piano played itself without any one touching it.

The Manifestations, he declared, were authentic. The house is 300 years old and the legend is that a former occupier of nearby Stockwell Hall exercised his dogs in the school grounds.

North Benfleet





A wood adjoining the land of Fanton Hall, which was known as Shrieking Boy, or Screeching Boy's Wood is said to be so called because a ploughman had killed his plough-boy with his plough. According to the church registers a murder was committed on Fanton Hall Farm in 1734 and this seems to support the legend.

A more colourful version is that, in a fit of temper, a woodsman working in the copse at the end of Kingsley Lane cut off his working boy's head because he was not working hard enough. Hiding the torse in a hollow tree the woodsman told the local people who asked about the boy that he had run away.

The woodsman, so the story goes, was haunted by the boy he had murdered and used to get drunk to try and stop the bloodcurdling screams coursing through his head.

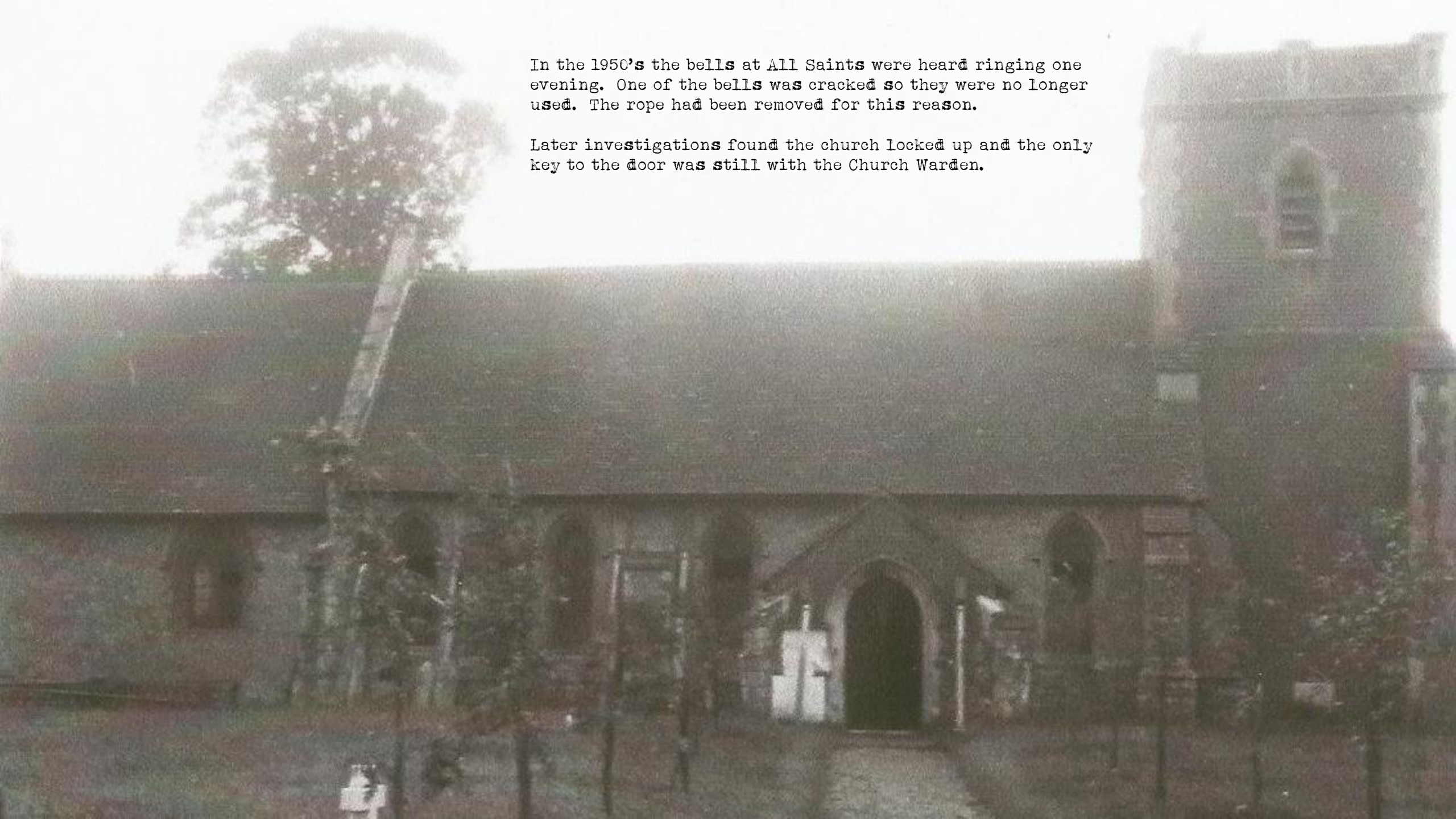
The boy was supposed to sit on the gate at the entrance to the wood now and then scream when anyone approached, to remind them of his murder. It is said that sometime afterwards some children went to see if the legend was true and sure enough, sitting on the gate was a screaming figure: they fled without ascertaining if it was a headless ghost.

In the late 20th Century reports were made by a family of a girl being hit by their car. When they got out to find the girl there was no one around. There was also no evidence of any damage to the vehicle.



In the 1950's the bells at All Saints were heard ringing one evening. One of the bells was cracked so they were no longer used. The rope had been removed for this reason.

Later investigations found the church locked up and the only key to the door was still with the Church Warden.

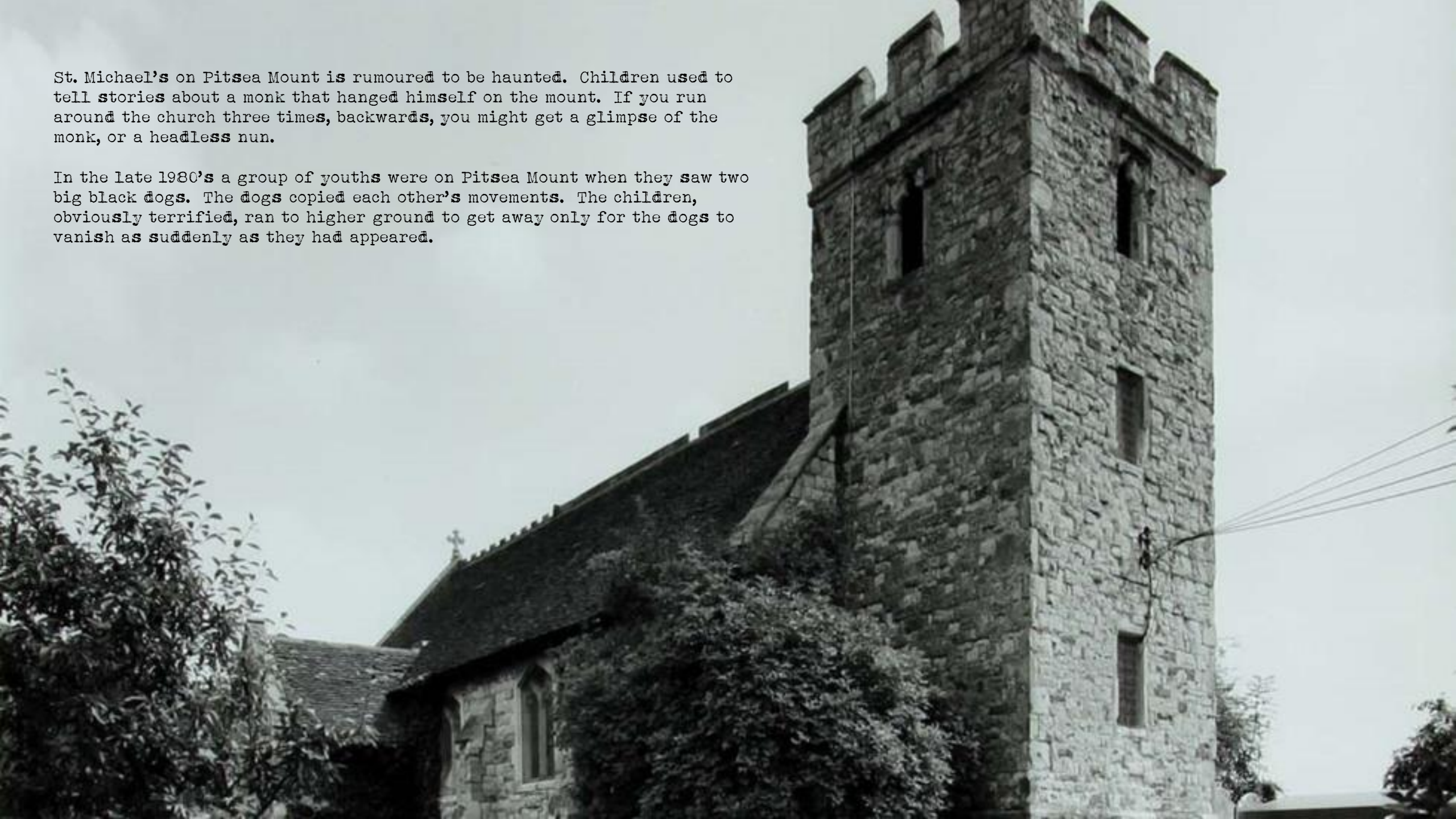


Pitsea



St. Michael's on Pitsea Mount is rumoured to be haunted. Children used to tell stories about a monk that hanged himself on the mount. If you run around the church three times, backwards, you might get a glimpse of the monk, or a headless nun.

In the late 1980's a group of youths were on Pitsea Mount when they saw two big black dogs. The dogs copied each other's movements. The children, obviously terrified, ran to higher ground to get away only for the dogs to vanish as suddenly as they had appeared.

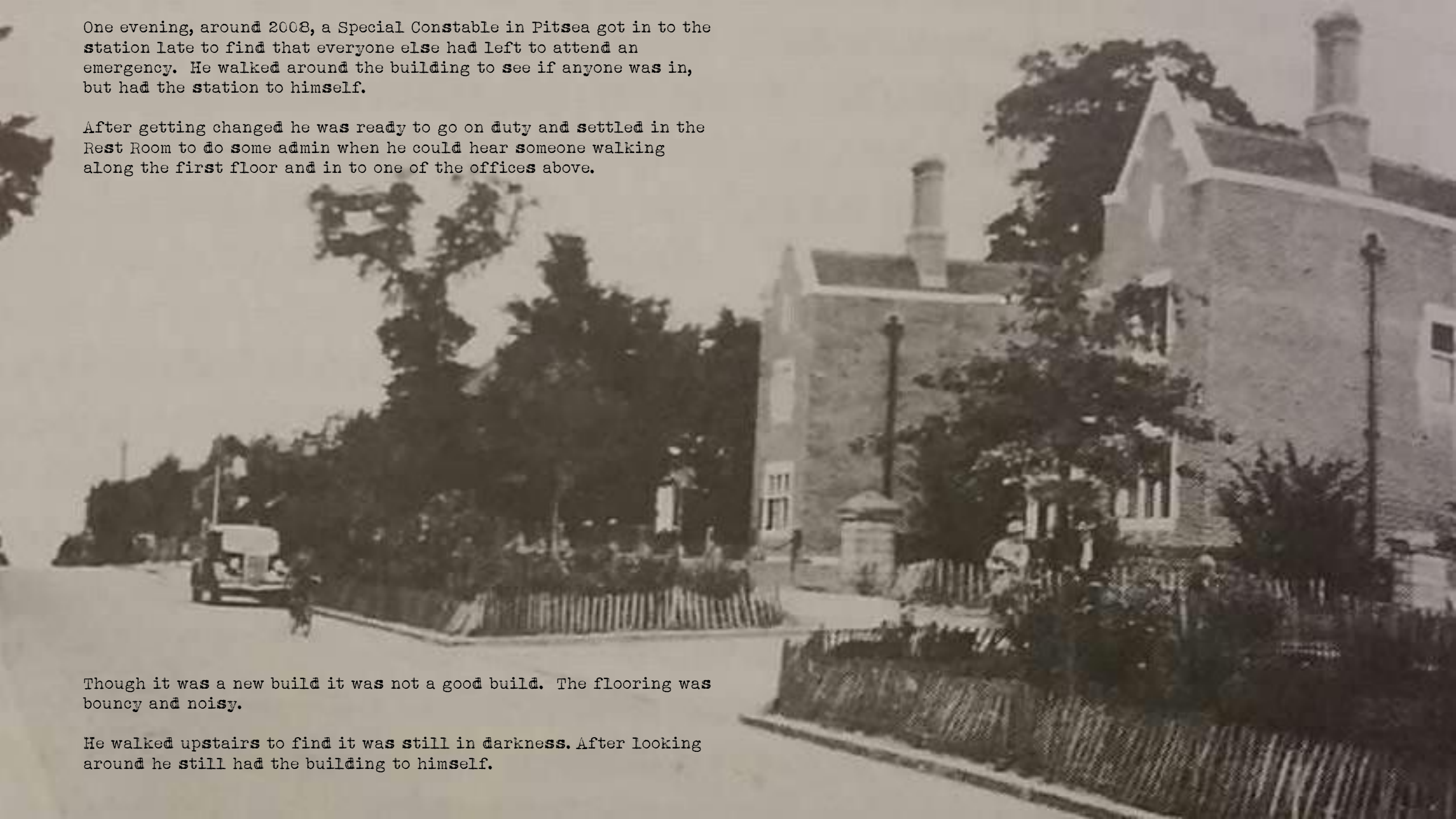


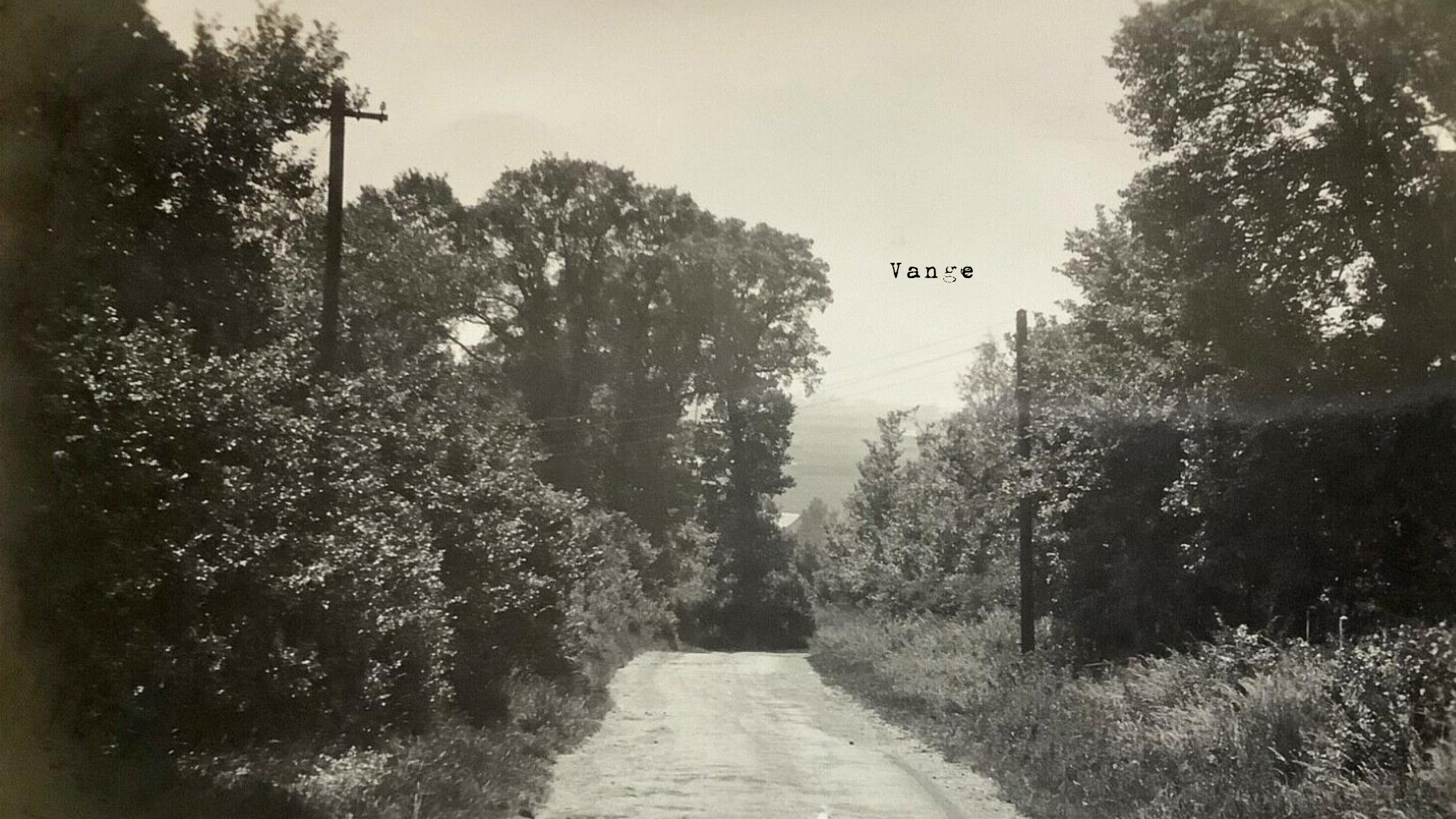
One evening, around 2008, a Special Constable in Pitsea got in to the station late to find that everyone else had left to attend an emergency. He walked around the building to see if anyone was in, but had the station to himself.

After getting changed he was ready to go on duty and settled in the Rest Room to do some admin when he could hear someone walking along the first floor and in to one of the offices above.

Though it was a new build it was not a good build. The flooring was bouncy and noisy.

He walked upstairs to find it was still in darkness. After looking around he still had the building to himself.





Vange

The entrance to Church Road (then called Bull Road), Vange, from Clay Hill Road, was firmly believed to be haunted.

This ghost was of a mischievous nature and was said to throw people over the hedge and into the fields.

The occupier of Basildon Hall was one who said that he had had this unpleasant experience. So strong was the belief that men leaving the Bull Inn after dark would not go that way alone, but waited for company.

There does not appear to be any story to account for the ghost, but it was a very lonely place with tall elms either side of the road and no houses in sight.

Strangely enough Ken remembers his father saying that, as a boy, he never liked that part of the road at night. Whether he had heard of the ghost or not, it seems as if there was something uncanny about that piece of road.

A school now stands on one side and shops on the corner; some of the trees survive and mischievous spirits trouble no one.



Bull Road, 1932

A ghost walks the A13 at Vange. Mr John Howard, when he was licensee of the Five Bells Inn, saw it. In an interview with the Thurrock Gazette of 26 September 1969 he said, "There was always a lot of talk in the pub about a ghost. On several occasions from the upstairs bedroom, I saw it.

"First I heard a thumping noise and then I saw the ghost. It was pure white and coming down the A13 from the direction of Vange Church and then it disappeared over in the direction of the Fobbing rail crossing. I know I saw it and nobody will ever convince me different".



In the **second** half of the 19th century farm hands were frightened to go on **Pitsea Marshes** at night because of **strange lights**, which they were convinced had **ghostly origins**, but were probably made by **smugglers**.

Old Boosey, who lived on **Vange Marshes**, was frightened by a **Jack O'Lantern**, which was believed to be an omen of **death**. He **did not** know that the **ghostly light** was due to the **spontaneous** combustion of **gases** from **decaying** vegetable matter on **marshy ground**.



It is said that a ghostly black dog is sometimes seen crossing the road from Vange to Fobbing where there was an avenue of trees near White Hall Farm. The shadows of the trees no doubt helped the illusion.



Wickford



A ghost of a girl has been seen in Wickford trying to get a lift. It is claimed that she was killed in a motorcycle accident whilst on her way to Southend in the 1960's.



The children of Wickford would run past the old Congregational Church graveyard because they believed it was haunted by a large black dog.



Beeches Cottages, that once stood on the corner of Wick Lane and Southend Road, may have been haunted. Tales suggest that the spirit of a lady used to inhabit the house after she was refused food when she visited the Rectory.

