

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor:

The ghostly nun of Borley Rectory

On 5 February, while working in the café at my gym, as I so often do, I had just ended a video call with a new potential student where we had been speaking about her family's past in the Second World War and at Dunkirk. A lady at a table near me made a comment on the conversation I'd just been having, and showed me she was reading the book *War Horse* (1982) by Michael Morpurgo. The lady, Mrs Jean Daws, is a resident of Mansfield, born in 1938. What really surprised me in our conversation—given that in my previous meeting I had been speaking about the process of university admissions and the Second World War—was that Mrs Daws quite randomly mentioned that her mother “saw the nun at Borley”. To which I replied, “In Essex? Your mother was at Borley Rectory before it burnt down?” Mrs Daws agreed to write up some notes on this for me so that I might share them here in the *JSPR*. A most pleasing coincidence.

Mrs Edith Evans (later Crossland, and the mother of Mrs Daws) was born in Mansfield in 1906 at Rock Hill Stone Houses (no longer standing) and passed away in 1986. Her mother died when she was young, and her father remarried. She owned a good workhorse as part of the family business, and one day, when going down to feed him an apple, he was gone—taken to the First World War, never to return. At around the age of 18–20 years, and a noted woman of good looks and a talented singer, Mrs Evans took herself down to London to sing and dance in the Gar Kiddy Troup. Her father sent for her return, for personal reasons, which left Mrs Evans working in the Swan Hotel in Mansfield, which did not bring her happiness. She fell in love with a military man, but only saw him on short breaks at home, trying to keep in touch as often as possible.

Then came the job opportunity that led to her unique experiences. A position came up at Borley Rectory in Essex, likely at this time to work for the Reverend Lionel Algernon Foyster and his wife, Marianne. Her duties were general housekeeping and looking after the Foysters' adopted daughter Adelaide and any other children who visited.

Mrs Evans reported that bells would ring in the house for service, but, on inspection, no one was there. As her daughter recounts:

One night at bedtime Mum had a bottle of medicine. She dropped the bottle, it broke, [and] her friend said “leave it till morning” and not to disturb anybody. In [that same] night a man came to Mum’s bedside, he said “follow me!” [The] next morning Mum told a co-worker about the dream. Mum’s foot was stuck to the sheet with blood! So it was not just a dream, the spots of blood went to a fireplace and down the hall.

Mrs Evans had reported to her son and daughter over the years another strange encounter at Borley Rectory. She had been sitting on the lawn, looking after Adelaide and other children, and saw a nun walk by on the other side of the hedge and then disappear. During the time of Harry Price’s investigations of the rectory, and indeed before, this was a well-noted apparitional sighting—‘the nun’s walk’ (Price, 1940, 1946). At dark, a horse and cart would rush by the lane. These experiences had frightened Mrs Evans. She left the service of the Foysters, and moved to Gleneagles Gold Hotel, where she met her future husband, and father to Mrs Jean Daws and her brother. During the time of the Reverend Foyster’s residence at Borley, he believed the ghosts had taken a liking to his wife, and had the building exorcised. It was reported that the activity lessened but then returned, and so, like Mrs Evans, the Foysters left through fear of the disturbances. The residents who followed were also unnerved by similar encounters, until the house burnt down in 1939 and the ruins demolished in 1944 (for *JSPR* coverage of the case, see Dingwall et al., 1969; Hastings, 1969, 1970; Owen & Mitchell, 1979).

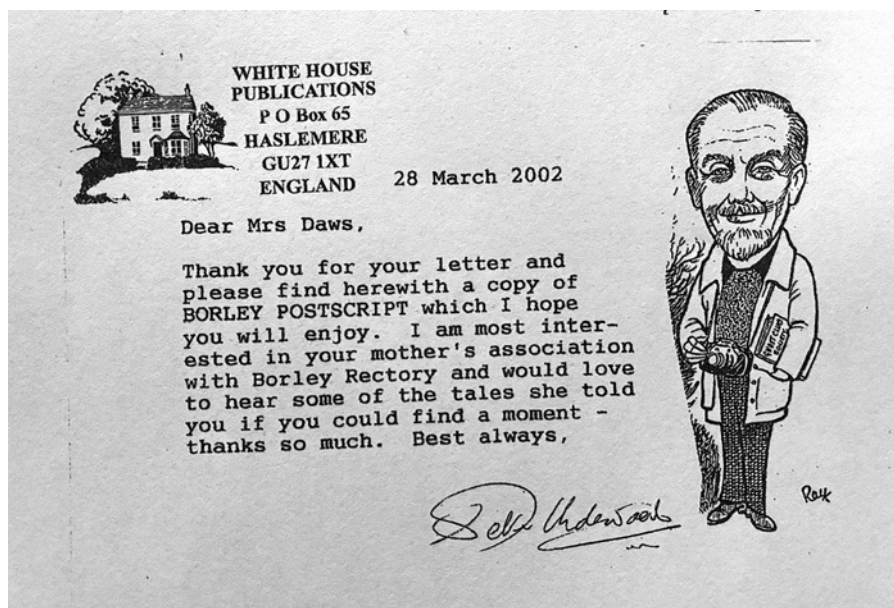


Figure 1. Example of the correspondence from Mr Underwood to Mrs Daws.

Over the years of hearing these stories, Mrs Daws decided to reach out to the ghosthunter and Society for Psychical Research member Mr Peter Underwood. He wrote several books on Borley Rectory, ending with the *Borley Postscript* (2001). He too showed interest in Mrs Evans's memories and experiences of the haunting, kindly forwarding a copy of his book to Mrs Daws in 2004 and remaining in contact till 2008 (Figure 1). And here, dear editor, in this letter are what remains of that account, thanks to the daughter, Mrs Jean Daws, who kindly took the time to speak to me quite by chance.

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