

GHOSTED: A HISTORY OF GHOST HUNTING, AND WHY WE KEEP LOOKING

*By Alice Vernon. Bloomsbury Sigma. 2025. 304 pp. Hardback, paperback,
ebook, and audiobook*

Ghosted, by Alice Vernon, is the latest addition to the Bloomsbury Sigma series devoted to popular science. The book is therefore written for a general audience, and while it touches on a wealth of relevant topics, those hoping for a granular history of psychical research will be disappointed. However, for those who wish for an engaging, anecdotal, and easy-to-read introduction to the field, and to the larger context of Spiritualism, *Ghosted* will fit the bill. Vernon, a lecturer in creative writing at Aberystwyth University, UK, with a research interest in psychical research, structures her book roughly chronologically, from the beginnings of Spiritualism with the Fox sisters to contemporary ghost hunters armed with the latest electronic gadgets and anxious to maximize their exposure on YouTube and TikTok.

Each of the chapters focuses on a specific topic: mediums, séances, and the problem of fraud; the early history of the Society for Psychical Research and later societies; haunted houses; spirit photography and electronic voice phenomena; Spiritualist cosmology, especially that of A. J. Davis and W. T. Stead; the revival of Spiritualism after the First World War; séances in the laboratory; poltergeists; spirit possession and haunted objects; and the recent phenomenon of ghost hunting reality TV. Along the way, a lot of familiar names are dropped (e.g., F. W. H. Myers, Harry Price, Eileen Garrett, and Harry Houdini) and familiar incidents recounted (e.g., the Raymond séances and the haunting of Borley Rectory), but all is told with tolerant good humour and a great deal of respect for the emotional needs of believers. Vernon introduces herself as a sceptic who is nevertheless open to the possibility of psychic phenomena, especially ghosts. Throughout the book, Vernon recounts her own equivocal experiences in this regard, including her certification training through the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena and subsequent forays with local ghost hunting groups. Vernon concludes her book with a meditation on the possible impact of technology, including AI, on the ghost hunting of the future.

A number of popular books in the last twenty years have covered much the same ground as *Ghosted*: for example, Deborah Blum's *Ghost Hunters: William*

James and the Search for Scientific Proof of Life After Death (2006), Mary Roach's *Spook: Science Tackles the Afterlife* (2005), Lisa Morton's *Calling the Spirits: A History of Seances* (2020), and Ben Machell's *Chasing the Dark: The Society for Psychical Research's 140-Year Investigation of Paranormal Activity* (2025). *Ghosted*, while it doesn't add too much that is new in this genre, nevertheless is a creditable addition to this list: deftly written, insightfully humane, and in its way comprehensive, this would not be a bad place to start for those wishing to explore the history of ghostly phenomena and psychical research.

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