

What to do if you see a Ghost by Graham Watkins

The reality of and the possible nature of the phenomena known as "ghosts" were discussed. It was noted that while a "ghost" is normally believed to be the "spirit" of someone who has died, there is at the moment no empirical evidence for this. The case of [Harry Houdini](#), who made plans to contact his wife after his death and pass on, via a medium, a previously determined code phrase, was mentioned - and the fact that this experiment failed. Other possibilities to explain "ghosts," in particular unrecognized natural phenomena such as infrasound, were discussed, and the case of [Vic Tandy's "haunted laboratory"](#) was mentioned.

The rather enormous anecdotal literature on "ghosts" - the huge numbers of sightings and encounters worldwide, throughout all cultures - was presented as evidence that there is some sort of reality to these phenomena, although what sort is not yet clear. Cases discussed briefly included ["The Bell Witch"](#), the Gate City Sentinel, the Mako Light, and [Bobby Mackey's Music World](#).

A fairly large part of the discussion concerned photographs taken of "ghosts." "Orbs" and "vortices" appearing in photographs are commonly presented as evidence of paranormal events. Many, however, can be explained in other ways; "orbs" and "vortices" are commonly out-of-focus objects close to the lens or [lens flare](#); other ghostly photos may be the result of double exposures, exposures of long duration, outright fraud, or, quite commonly, the psychological process known as [pareidolia](#), which is the human tendency to try to organize random shapes into recognizable objects (the "Virgin Mary on a tortilla" effect, and the allied "electronic voice phenomenon," where voices are "heard" in white noise). A few samples of such photos can be seen here. One photo, which does not fit easily into these categories, is the photo of "ghosts" taken about the ship "SS Watertown;" the story can be read and the photo seen [here](#). The possibility that ghostly phenomena are the result of misinterpretations of unfamiliar sensations - in a manner analogous to the way people appear to "see" strong magnetic fields when no light is being emitted by them - was also discussed, especially in reference to a "haunted house" where a variety of loud sounds could be "heard" but not recorded on a cassette recorder.

Finally, a curiosity was mentioned - a strange little animal with a rabbit's head that appears in ghost stories worldwide. As an example, it is a part of the Bell Witch saga, as described in [this account](#). (presenter's summary)