

Jolimont Street Ghost

By Jeremy Tyrrell

Book 4 of Paranormology

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Dedication

For my fellow engineer, zealous reader and critic, Sarah.

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1 - The Dark](#)

[Chapter 2 - The Cellar](#)

[Chapter 3 - The Interloper](#)

[Chapter 4 - Losing Control](#)

[Chapter 5 - Unwelcome](#)

[Chapter 6 - Doctor Halfpenny](#)

[Chapter 7 - My Dark Dream](#)

[Chapter 8 - Persona Non Grata](#)

[Chapter 9 - The Beast](#)

[Chapter 10 - The Light](#)

[About the Author](#)

[More Works](#)

The Dark

If the Professor were to realise that I have written these accounts, he might well release me from employment or worse, he would have grounds to enlist the services of a solicitor to sue me! He has reiterated to the point of distraction the importance of secrecy to the future of our field of research.

Still, I cannot leave these tales untold, especially since the latest encounter.

During our research, we have experienced many strange and unworldly phenomena, from rapping on walls to apparitions, from phantom smells to disembodied voices. None of these, I came to realise, were worthy of *fear*.

Noises cannot harm. Smells cannot harm. A disembodied, floating head is repulsive, to say the least, yet it can do no more injury to you or I than a fly.

My mother told me that there was nothing to fear in the dark, for, she said, there is nothing in the dark that is not there in the light. This was my creed and, coupled with my strange but benign experiences, I had lulled myself into feeling fearless, indomitable.

The entities we had so far pursued were so innocuous that I scoffed at those who feared them, I brashly strode into every darkened room with an air of cockiness. I approached, rather than shrank from, manifestations. At times I would even resort to provocation in order to get a reaction.

This boldness was almost my undoing.

Like a warrior who fights only straw-men, I was completely unprepared for what I was to face.

I am thus compelled once more to break my promise to the Professor and record the events in this journal. The scientific nature of our observations do not convey the full effect of what transpired in Jolimont Street and, I fear, they may never see the light of day.

We had been investigating the house as part of our usual routine to make scientific observations. It had been reported as 'creepy' by neighbours, past and present, although our findings had shown the house to be decidedly sterile in nature.

In fact, we had found so little in the way of activity, that the Professor had classified the building as a 'scientific control', a reference point for a house that is *not* haunted, a standard to which we might

calibrate our equipment and compare environmental observations for similar locations and seasons.

I would not look forward to spending time in Jolimont Street. Not because of any particular feeling or unease, no, I despised our sessions there simply because they were boring. On more than one occasion, I had voiced my indignation, as on the afternoon my story begins.

“Professor, must we really spend tonight at Jolimont? In what way can one more set of observations be useful? We have a month of Sundays and more besides, and the deviation in results is nothing short of unremarkable!” I complained.

The Professor looked up from his bag. “Unremarkable? Lad, are you listening to what you are saying or are you making a habit of letting your mouth run wild? The magnetoscope needs calibration. The new vibrometer as well. Plus we've not performed observations for the start of Autumn.”

“Wouldn't our time be better spent at Casings Place or North Avenue?”

“Laddie, we need to make observations whether we want to or not. It is not a decision we, as proper scientists, get to make. We must have a control. If we don't, we'll have nothing against which to compare, nothing to call standard.”

“I am thinking that the Board will not see this as useful.”

“You let me worry about the Board!” he said, eyes flashing. “Those dry-headed chin-waggers are not your concern. We've a secure funding, now, so the finances are not under threat. Don't let all that nonsense enter your head.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“You are here to perform a duty. That duty requires that you treat each investigation as seriously as the last, that you maintain a scientific attitude at all times, that you do not question my decisions!”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Will that be all?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Good, good. The air is humid tonight, and at this eleva – which reminds me, take the hygrometer. Oh, and pack up those photographic plates. And wipe that look off your face! We *will* be taking photographs tonight,” he said, “Keep them well sealed, the humidity might spoil them. *Now*, if you'd be so kind?”

I did my best to hide my disappointment. Not at taking the photographs, for that was second nature to me. Examining photograph after

photograph from such inactive places as Jolimont was a thankless, mindless drudge of a chore. In a whole slab of plates, I would be lucky to find even one thing that I might classify as abnormal.

Abnormal in the usual sense, not paranormal, mind. In such photographs there might be a fleck of dust floating near the lens, or a gnat flying by just as the aperture was opened. In older, dustier, infested houses, these were more common.

In such well kept houses such as the one on Jolimont, the most I could hope for was a corruption of the photographic plates: sometimes the salts had not been applied properly, or they were scratched or exposed prior to use.

The Professor's concern about humidity was valid. It was possible, though rare, to discover that the ambient water vapour had condensed onto the plates or the lens as the night cooled, causing curious yet annoying artefacts to appear.

All of these abnormalities had to be documented, if only as a reference for what does *not* constitute a haunting, and in order to find them I would spend the better part of the next day hunched over a pile of prints, magnifying glass in hand, scouring every corner of the image.

What was the yield? What did we have to show for our efforts? In what way did all of the hard labour, the calculations, the hours bent over photographs and observations manifest? The same way it had for every other visit to Jolimont Street, as a single line at the bottom of the Professor's report:

No paranormal activity observed. Refer to appendices for further information.

After this the report, the photographs and all supporting documentation would be placed inside an envelope and sealed, preserved and waiting to be opened after eternity has been and gone.

I guess that is partly the reason I am writing these cases. It is a selfish thing I am doing, unburdening myself by sharing my experiences, I acknowledge this, though I do claim that it is also in the Professor's interest to show that there is more to his investigations than statistics and tendencies.

The Professor's peers mock him for his efforts. No others follow in his footsteps, none of influence consider Paranormology a valid science. The University Board barely tolerates his presence, let alone his choice of

academia.

Still, he insists on keeping to his rigid methodology, despite how fruitless it appears, and it was his dogmatic enthusiasm that led me, once more, to the overly familiar door of the house in Jolimont Street.

Unassuming, it belonged to a rank of similar houses, each doing its best to remain as nondescript as the next. In fact, if it were not for the fences that separated the front yard of each property, one might think that the length of Jolimont Street was a giant wing of some obscure palace.

The population was higher, here, being so close to the heart of the city, and as a consequence the houses tended to be more vertical than horizontal.

Number thirteen had a token garden out the front, an effort to provide some vegetation to offset the solid wall of brown and cream brick, wrought iron bars and black doors. There was a little patch of ground out the back, untended and overgrown, since the owner had been overseas, and an alley to provide access for the coaler.

As one might imagine in such a closely arranged environment, with each neighbour able to hear the goings on of the other, and see, from their top floor, the movements in both the street and the backyards and alleys, gossip was rife.

The Professor avoided conversation with the folk around there. He cited that the reason was to save time; less gabbing meant more investigating. The real reason, I am sure, was to avoid the drama, scandal and speculation altogether.

I was of a different mind. I considered that by denying them the truth they would cling to any titbit of tantalising scuttlebutt and these were apt to grow into speculation and rumour if not set right.

Missus Butterfield, neighbour and infamous fat-chewer, was at the gate when we approached, holding her bonnet onto her head even though the wind was not blowing.

“Hello, Ma'am,” I called, jumping off the hansom. “How are you and how is Mister Butterfield?”

“We're both of us well, thank you for asking, young Master,” she replied. “You'll be hunting about for spooks again tonight, yes?”

“Spooks, yes,” I said, completing the ritual. “Although we would be lucky to spot but a mouse. Tell me, any news of Mister French? Has he sent any word from overseas?”

“No, young Master. I've not seen nor heard anyone around that house for a while now. Well, there have been a couple of salesmen, and the man

from the census was tapping without answer. I've got some more of his mail all tied up. Here," she said. "There's one in there from the bank, so I put that on the top of the pile so he can see it first thing. I think he will appreciate that I prioritise his mail."

I smiled and took the bundle, "I am sure he will."

It has always astonished me how such people are able to justify their snooping, disguising it, perhaps even fooling themselves into believing that it is an act of goodwill.

"Thank you, Missus Butterfield. I had better get these inside," I said, holding up the cases. "The Professor, you know."

I hoped that I did not sound impolite, ending the conversation so abruptly, only Missus Butterfield was the kind of woman who could easily talk your ear off, then get busy on the other one.

"I understand, young Master, I understand. Get along with you and don't you keep that Professor of yours waiting. Say, before you go, I've often wondered if there was any person that he is interested in?"

"Well, that usually depends on the location we are investigating. The activity can sometimes be traced back to a former tenant," I offered.

"Ah, no. What I mean to ask is if he is currently engaged."

I looked over at the Professor, wagging his head, hauling in the magnetoscope box that I was supposed to be carrying.

"He's currently engaged getting the boxes inside the house."

"You misunderstand. Has your employer a particular interest outside of his work, then?"

I shrugged, "Astronomy. Biology. Most of the physical sciences."

"A romantic interest?"

"I am sorry?"

"Does he have a lady friend?"

"Oh. Oh, um, no. He might, I guess, but not that I know of," I said, "We don't really talk about such matters. I think that he has, in the past."

"You should know these things."

"It's not really my business. Anyway, I had better –"

"You should make it you business! Only it's not good for any man to be without a woman, especially at his age. Why, who would take care of him? You?"

"No, not me. I only assist in the investigations."

"Then who? That's what has me worried."

"I cannot say for certain, Missus –"

"Ah, don't you see? That's the problem with the world today, it is.

Men get all wrapped up in their careers and don't consider that what they really need is a good woman. Now, a few friends of mine..."

I listened to her ramble and nodded patiently, waiting for her to take a breath before I took my leave, "Yes, Missus Butterfield. I must get to work. Good evening."

The Professor was still taking stock of his equipment as I brought the remaining cases in and set them down on the table. We had made a map of the place some time back, and I took this out and lay it on the table, ready for the Professor to show me where he wanted me to set up.

"I want to try something a little different today," he mused, looking over the map. "I am going to set up equipment in various rooms and go from room to room to observe their readings."

"Forgive me, Professor. Is it not prudent to remain as still as possible during an investigation?"

"Normally, I would advocate that, yes, and I will require you to continue to observe as you have been trained. The way I figure it, if I wear these socks," he began, taking his shoes off and putting on a pair of thick, woollen socks. "I'll not make any noise, so won't affect your readings."

"Woollen socks? Professor, that could affect your electroscopes."

"Hmm. Indeed they could. Thank you for bringing that up, I'll be sure to discharge myself regularly. Any further objections?"

"My ears are very sensitive, Professor," I said. "Plus, the floorboards will shift as you tread. That will interfere with my readings."

"Hmm. Again, you're right. In that case, you will need to observe as far away from my route as possible."

We both looked at the map. The Professor's route took him from the upstairs bedrooms, past the study and back to the kitchen.

"Apart from the garden out the back, I cannot see anywhere that might..."

"The cellar, I should think."

I had not even included that on the map.

"Really? Um. Really?"

He looked up at me slowly. I knew what those eyes meant.

"I mean, yes, Professor."

We had not visited the cellar before, primarily because there were plenty of other, more comfortable rooms in the house to investigate. Cellars are cramped, smelly places that no one wants to visit, let alone sit in to observe for hours.

And there was always the possibility of rats, a concern that I

vocalised.

“Vermin are the very thing we should be looking for! Do they make noise? Do they move? Can they interact with their environment? Of course, laddie! Their actions are commonly mistaken for things unworldly and, this being a control, we can document the sounds and behaviours of these creatures, so rather than shunning them and lamenting your lot, you'll make observational notes of any creatures you come across, no matter how unsavoury!”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Now stop whining and start acting like a scientist!”

That was all there was to the discussion.

Anything further I might add or ask would only ignite his temper, “Yes, Professor.”

The sun had disappeared, the night was still. Jolimont Street was noisy during the day, what with the printing works only a few streets away. Early in the morning, even as the Professor and I would be finishing up our investigation, the boys would stream in from all around to fetch their piles of papers to sell on the city corners.

Throughout the rest of the day the constant stream of traffic, of horses and gigs and passers-by, sounded like the city was chatting to itself in some archaic, lost language.

At night, however, the patrons went home, the journalists parked their notepads and packed their cameras, and a welcome quiet replaced the buzz. The occasional chatter of a hansom passing barely penetrated the walls of Mister French's house, and unless one was in the front room, one might consider the world outside to have disappeared.

I have a hunch that the quietude was a result of the neighbours' proximity, that the threat of being the subject of Missus Butterfield's razor tongue meant windows were shuttered, conversations held at respectable levels.

That was one of the Professor's primary reasons to investigate. The level of external contamination, for any investigation, is ideally zero. Being a young, well-maintained house, it did not groan and creak as much as others, there were no gaps in the plaster to let in the wind, the heavy curtains were not moth-ridden and were more than adequate for blocking the light from the street-lamps.

“An ideal control,” the Professor had said. “Any successful experimental campaign, be it for equipment or for observation, will require a control for calibration. One cannot make a comparison without

something against which to compare, hmm?”

It was from one of his old lectures, for sure, and he never grew tired of relating it to me, and it was with this thought in my mind that I descended the stairs, arms full of equipment, into the cellar.

The Cellar

I had to make three trips, for without six arms, I could not possibly hold the hygrometer, the barometer, the thermometer, the lantern, my notepad, watch and pencil as well as the vibrometer and electroscope.

Thank Goodness the Professor did not require me to bring the magnetoscope and camera as well!

Muttering under my breath, for fear the Professor might mistake my annoyance for ingratitude – I was, and am, very grateful for the employment – I made my last trip to the bottom of the steps, made sure my lantern was full of oil, checked that the watch was wound and looked about for a place to sit.

I spied a large, rusted milk can, about the right size for a seat, wedged up in the back corner underneath a crate filled with empty bottles which, in turn, was covered by an old rag.

On top of all of this was a smooth, heavy stone, holding everything down. The whole arrangement appeared almost as a shrine, precariously and deliberately placed.

Now, I was not about to stand the whole time and while we did promise Mister French to leave his house in the same state in which we found it, I considered the removal of a stone, a crate of bottles, and an old rag to be of no great significance.

I hooked my lantern on a nail in the roof, set my notepad to one side, and lifted the stone. It was astonishingly heavy given its size, much like lead, and I struggled to lower it onto the ground.

The rag was much lighter. On closer inspection, the linen I was shifting was made of a curious cloth, very closely woven with small figures of stars, cursive shapes and symbols embroidered in intricate patterns. It was greatly aged and felt so delicate, as though it might tear under its own weight.

I set the bundle down on the floor. For all I knew, it could have been a precious heirloom for the French family, even though being left out in the open like that was only asking for rats, mice and moths to make their home within.

I lifted up the crate of bottles, hefting it against my chest, when I noticed a lump of fur in which were embedded two black orbs, shining orange in the light of the lantern. The mouse had scuttled out of one of the

bottles and was now eye-level, so close to my nose that it looked a whole lot bigger than actuality.

With a stifled shriek, my mind told my legs to run backward and my arms to thrust forwards, and before I knew what had happened, the crate, and its cargo, was shattered across the floor, and I had tangled my feet in the rags.

I danced to free myself, but only succeeded in tearing the fragile cloth. I pirouetted, clashed against a shelf of preserves, tottered like a burnt out tower and thudded to the dirt.

A few seconds later, the Professor was at the top of the stairs to the cellar, blocking the doorway. His form was only barely visible against the darkness upstairs, yet his angry face was illuminated in the lantern's amber glow.

“What have you done, laddie?” he called, peering down, “Have you broken anything?”

In truth, I still do not know if he meant bones or bottles.

“Hello, Professor. There was a mouse...” I groaned, pulling myself from the floor while avoiding the broken glass.

“A mouse? Did I not say that you were to only *observe* any vermin?”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Oh, look, there's glass everywhere. Tsk! You had better clean up. There's a broom in the kitchen.”

“Yes, Professor.”

“Anything that needs replacing will be coming out of your wages.”

“It was an accident,” I said, reaching the top of the stairs. “I did not mean to do it. I was startled.”

“Of course you didn't mean to do it. That's why it's called an accident,” he said.

He looked over my shoulder to the mess below.

“Really, lad, haven't you outgrown your clumsiness yet?”

“I'm not sure I ever will,” I said, searching about for the broom.

“Well, at least we have established that vermin inhabits the basement. Be sure to make a recording of everything you see and hear, once you've cleaned up of course, oh – you haven't broken any equipment, have you?”

I shook my head, “I don't know, Professor. I'll let you know as soon as I have taken stock.”

“Yes, well, do that. We've already lost enough time,” he went off shaking his head and mumbling. “*Scared of a bloody mouse...*”

Well, I knew I was clumsy, and I knew I had a lot to learn, but I was

not about to be considered a coward!

I swept and cleaned as quickly as I could, keeping watch for that little fur-ball in case it should present itself enough for me to smite with my broom.

Many of the bottles that had fallen from the crate were shattered, others were intact but had spilled their contents: white and black powders, fragments of bone, hair and feathers. The larger items I replaced into the bottles, but the powders and hairs proved too difficult and ended up adding to the confusion.

Curious as the contents were, I was more concerned with the broken glass that littered the dirt floor in irregular, tiny shards. The more I swept, the more the little shards buried themselves into the dirt, refusing to be collected.

With that sorted as best I could manage, I picked up the tangled cloth, inspected a large hole where my foot had torn it, assessing if the damage done was even repairable. My heart sank. From the age of it, I figured that any repair would be insufficient, so I would need to pay for it in full. My only hope was that it was merely a rag left in the basement by one of Mister French's servants.

Some preserves had fallen from the shelves, two of which were leaking red vinegar – yet more items to be paid for upon Mister French's return – and the mouse, that rotten mouse, was nowhere to be seen.

The stone, it seemed, was the only thing to come out unscathed.

Notepad in hand, I sat down on my hard-won drum, disconsolate, trying my best to keep my mind on the job.

Observation is an arduous task. One might consider that sitting in a room, watching, listening, feeling, with only a few hidden mice for company, might not be so taxing. In part, this is true. There is no manual lifting or bending or awkward postures to maintain, and it felt good to get off my feet after a long shift at the library, but the mind, like a muscle, gets fatigued.

Keeping regular recordings throughout the night is one way to keep myself occupied, to stop my mind from wandering too much. After a while, one looks forward to the blessing of any kind of activity to break the monotony.

Jolimont House, Basement.

Time: 10:25

Temp Delta: -0.5

Baro: 29.89

Hygro: 28

Vibro: 0.1

Electro: Flat

No sounds can be heard.

My face went red, even though no one was about. I knew what I had to do, to be thorough, to be *scientific*. Yet the thought of immortalising my clumsiness in writing for peers to laugh at was agonising. Still, I had a duty, and there was a good chance I would never meet my critics, so I did the right thing and wrote:

Saw a mouse while moving crate. Dropped crate, breaking bottles. Cleaned up. Damage is seven broken glass bottles and their contents, two preserve jars are opened, one cloth is torn, glass fragments are in the cellar floor.

With that done I put my notepad and chagrin to one side and nestled down for a long night. The Professor was operating the camera upstairs. He did not mention that he wanted photographs in the basement, which suited me just fine, since the high level of dust in the air would only make each photograph a field of specks, each of which would need to be individually investigated and dismissed.

Imagine being hunched over a pile of photographs, magnifying glass in hand, for hours, documenting the position and description of each speck, blur or haze, then categorising them as 'dust', 'insect' or 'fluff'.

It was not as if we needed more samples of what constitutes false positives. The filing cabinet is fairly brimming with them!

Still, for every hundred photographs that show nothing, we come across one that shows *something*. Something that cannot be rationally explained away. Something that ties into the history of the house we investigated, into the anomalous happenings we recorded.

One can think of it as mining, sifting through piles and piles of muck and dirt to find the few glittering specks we so crave. As the Professor labours, we do not know where or when these precious gifts might present themselves, and should be conscious, at all times, for their manifestation.

A goal of our observational approach is to define environmental trends that can increase the possibility, and therefore reliability, of detecting anomalies.

I understood this, agreed with it whole heartedly, yet I also despised the unrewarding labour that resulted in defining 'normality'. So, while the scientist in me supported the idea of taking photographs of a boring cellar, the practical side of me shuddered at the thought.

After five minutes I took my readings again:

Time: 10:30

Temp Delta: -0.7

Baro: 29.89

Hygro: 28

Vibro: 0.1

Electro: Separated

“That's odd,” I whispered, because it was.

I try not to talk to myself during an investigation, but every so often, such as on this occasion, I find myself verbalising my thoughts. It is a habit formed, perhaps, to assure me that normalcy still exists, that I am not dreaming. It is also a habit I am yet to break.

The Professor has rebuked me over this time and time again, “Your words cannot interfere if you keep them inside your mouth!”

Anyway, I was still on edge from my mishap and feeling more than a little ashamed, so seeing the electroscopes leaves in such a state jolted me.

We have had instances in the past where the electroscopes leaves had separated from each other due to natural occurrences. On at least two occasions it was because I had walked over long-pile carpet, which charged my body which, in turn, charged the leaves and caused them to part.

Another time the Professor postulated that the electrical activity of a thunderstorm had caused the air around the electroscopes to be charged.

In the basement, there was no carpet, and the weather outside was just fine. I peered closely through the glass, just to be sure my eyes were not playing tricks.

Indeed, there was a clear gap between the leaves.

I looked about for anything magnetic or electrical in nature, not that I expected to find something like that in a residential basement, for such oddities belong in universities and laboratories. Yet I remained dutiful, made no assumptions and examined the cellar for any reason why the electroscopes should have formed a reading.

Nothing can be found to excite the electroscope. No machinery, steam, electric or magnetic, can be found. There is no carpet, the floor is compacted dirt with some flags. There are no curtains, no window to the outside. The weather outside was still, not at all stormy, when I entered.

I lowered my pencil and groaned. The rag, of course. If you have ever the chance to witness it, you can perform a simple experiment with a glass rod and a rag whereby you rub the two together vigorously and all manner of small feathers and dust will be attracted to the rod. This, the Professor had explained to me, is due to an imbalance of electrical charge.

The electroscope detects the exact same charge that causes the small objects to be attracted, so with a sigh I resumed my notes.

Possible contamination of evidence: there is an aged cloth, embroidered with what seems to be silk, that I had moved prior to sitting down. It may be that this, rubbing against another surface such as the bottles, or even the electroscope itself -

I paused. Something rustled close to a green tin, a little across from me. I strained my ears to listen, searching the gloom for any sign of another mouse, perhaps even the same one that had caused me such mischief. If that poor beast showed its face, I was ready. The broom was only at arm's length, ready for action.

Duty brought me back, and I hastily jotted down:

Rustle heard. Could not see the source.

Then added, without thinking:

Possibly a mouse.

The Professor does not like me to include presumptuous explanations within my observations. He says that they can skew an audience's opinion before all of the evidence has been presented.

This was different to the case of the electroscope, in that the rag was evident before me, a definite candidate for an explanation whereas, even though I had *previously* seen a mouse, and this certainly was the most *likely* explanation for the rustling, since I could not *directly see* the mouse, I should not have included it in my observations.

The Professor does not allow me to use an eraser, nor does he include one himself, “Only write what you see, hear and feel. If you made a mistake, correct it with another sentence.”

Even if I did have an eraser, or crossed out the words, the traces of my former recording would remain visible and perhaps compel the reader to consider that I removed a legitimate observation for my own agenda.

Such is the nature of the Professor's scientific research: Every note, every photograph, every measurement, every report must be meticulously performed, or there can be grounds for *reasonable doubt* as to the validity of the research, putting the investigation, present and prior, into jeopardy.

If you have read my previous documentations, you will understand exactly what I mean. The scientific community is necessarily a distrusting and unforgiving mob. It is in their nature, it is their *duty*, to question everything that is presented before them.

I finished up with my notes, pricked my ears and sat quietly in the dark cellar, waiting for the time to record the next observation, keeping the broom within reach.

Just in case.

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