

How a bit of dodgy wiring could prove ghosts don't exist

Some have seen them, some have not. Now a Wirral couple have a theory which could explain ghosts. **David Charters** reports

THE man or woman who discovers for sure that ghosts don't exist will become the most unpopular person in the world. Religions would collapse. Gullible Americans would no longer be held in thrall by tales of headless spectres in English stately homes. Scrooge could return to his miserly ways. There would be some banal explanations for chains clanking in the night or the temperature suddenly dropping. Hollywood scriptwriters would be seen queuing at soup kitchens.

More seriously than all that, though, Uncle Claud would no longer be able to gather all the family around the spitting coals of the Christmas fire to enchant them with tales of mystery, terror and hauntings.

In fact, all good people should cry, "long live our ghosts".

Now. Parascience. a



Actor Barry Howard as Marley's Ghost in a Liverpool Empire production of Scrooge last December - but is it fiction based on fiction?

Now, Parascience, a Wirral-based group, which investigates supernatural goings-on, is planning what it hopes will be the most comprehensive survey ever conducted into ghosts.

It comes as researchers offer a possible explanation about why certain people should be more prone than others to ghostly experiences and why these should be far more common in places, which would otherwise seem ordinary.

In short, it seems that such experiences could result from high amplitude electro-magnetic fields (EMF). Laboratory experiments conducted by Prof Michael Persinger at the psychology department of the Laurentian University, Ontario, have suggested that people are susceptible to paranormal sensations when their brains are exposed to high rates of EMF.

To see if similar results could be found outside the laboratory, Parascience visited a supposedly haunted farmhouse in the Knutsford area of Cheshire. Family members, who had been particularly concerned about weird happenings in one room, contacted the group after hearing a radio broadcast about ghosts.

Investigators found two ancient, frayed electricity cables attached to the guttering board outside the room.

Parascience's findings are now available on the internet. The group is composed of individuals, mostly from professional backgrounds, who are interested in paranormal activity. Their painstaking research into

hundreds of buildings, where people have experienced peculiar goings-on, has gained them a reputation for sound judgment, at a time when parapsychology courses are being offered at many universities.

On a lighter side, earlier this month, some of them took part in a TV experiment for the Living TV channel at Fyvie Castle, Aberdeenshire, said to be one of the most haunted buildings in the UK and home to the Green Lady.

Among the Parascience investigators in Scotland were Steve Parsons, 42, an instrument technician from Rock Ferry, who left Wirral Grammar School with 11 O levels. He is married to Alison and they have a daughter, Helen, eight.

One of the others there was Ann Winsper, 39, from Ellesmere Port, an old girl of Queen's School, Chester, now a pharmacy technician, who is studying for a degree in psychology at the Liverpool John Moores University.

"We didn't find the Green Lady, but we did find a few odd



Paranormal investigators Steve Parsons and Ann Winsper

happenings," she says. "They all happened in the room (the Dunfermline dressing room) where the furniture was stuffed to keep it out of the way. We think the ghost was hiding in there because were so many people in the castle."

Doors opened and closed, the

room went very cold and Steve felt, "there was a strong sense of presence".

In addition to the programme, the group has also been carrying out its own investigations at the castle. For this work, they use computerised monitoring equipment which measures

changes in the atmosphere, traditionally associated with paranormal activity, such as temperature, ionising radiation, humidity, light and electro-magnetic radiation.

Parascience was keen to see whether this happened outside strict laboratory conditions and they have conducted research at a number of locations, including the farmhouse, occupied by a father, mother and three children, two of them teenagers, all of whom were complaining of ghostly experiences.

Ordinary electrical appliances give off electro-magnetic waves without affecting most people in any discernible way.

But the 18-strong Parascience group had been working on the basis that in places, where there is an unusually high concentration of electricity, there will be an increase of paranormal goings-on.

In the farm, the electro-magnetic radiation was measured at more than 50 times the average domestic rate. This was traced to mains electricity cables tied to the gutter-boarding.

The cables were repaired and relocated by the electricity board and the incidence of strange happenings dropped sharply.

Now, to add to their research, Parascience is inviting people to take part in a survey by answering a series of questions on their website. www.parascience.org.uk

The ghosts of religion

MOST of the world's great religions place faith in an afterlife which can be achieved in various ways.

Once you have a belief in life continuing after death, it opens the way to the possibility of ghosts. To

certain American Indian tribes, the sighting of a ghost was not even regarded as particularly unusual. Some religions also accept that the spirits of animals will continue after earthly life.

However, the Christian

religion has taken the idea further with the Holy Ghost, the third member of the Trinity. There are, however, doctrinal differences between the various Christian denominations about whether the Ghost

proceeds from both the Father and the Son, or just the Father. But the presence of lesser ghosts is also accepted in most religions in which a priest, acting on God's authority can drive out evil spirits.