“On this particular Hallowe’en night...” so the story begins, “...Paul decided that he wasn’t going to tolerate the on-going damage and decided to hide himself up in the church graveyard.” This may sound like the beginning of a ghost story from the world of fiction, but it comes from a true story told by a former Police Sergeant of one of his Constables. It is one of many ghost stories collected between 2015 and 2016 from within the ranks of Essex Police by Essex Police Museum.

Stories which are handed down through generations of people are a rich part of our heritage and a key aspect of our folklore. Ghost stories are one of the most popular types of story in both the world of fiction and non-fiction, and for obvious reasons; they scare, delight, entertain and warn. Essex Police has its own particular folklore when it comes to ghost stories; tales of haunted police stations, disembodied footsteps, ghostly laughter and half-glimpsed apparitions. Handed down from officer to officer, employee to employee, these stories run through the police force like a blood line from the very earliest days of the Essex Constabulary.

**Canvey Island Police Station: Echoes from 1953?**

Canvey Island Police Station, on Long Road, Canvey Island, is among the most talked about when it comes to hauntings. A two-storey brick building, it is located near enough in the centre of the island.

On the night of 31st January 1953, one of the worst natural disasters in 20th century British history unfolded along the east coast. A combination of weather phenomena produced a surge of water which ripped down the North Sea, devastating the coast. Canvey Island was the worst affected area. The island was inundated and 59 people lost their lives. With
communications severely disrupted, the local police were the first responders and the only government agency on the scene for some time.

“I was alone in the station when I heard footsteps running backwards and forwards across the floor downstairs. I thought someone had come in and thought nothing initially of it until about 30 minutes later when the cars came back in. I questioned my colleagues about the running around – they told me that they hadn’t been in and had both been tied up at a job.”

This report was from one Police Constable based at Canvey Island in the 1990’s. Multiple reports of footsteps, doors opening and closing and, in particular, a cold and creepy feeling on one of the staircases were received...

“I worked at Canvey Island police station for a number of years and everybody who worked there used to say that the staircase at the kitchen end of the station was haunted as it is always cold no matter what time of year it was or how hot it was. Some people would always avoid using that staircase because they found it creepy. The rumour is that in the floods of 1953, police kept dead bodies at that end of the station as the flood water kept us from taking them to the mortuary until the water went down.”

To date, there is no evidence available to support the claim that the police station was used as a temporary mortuary during the events of 1953. However, the claim is made so often and with such a level of certainty that it is quite possible that there may be some truth in it. During those chaotic hours, it seems entirely plausible that the only government agency on the ground would take control of housing the unfortunate victims of the flood water.

**Thorpe-le-Soken Police Station: Someone, or something, in the cells?**

Thorpe-le-Soken Police Station is one of the oldest buildings in the Essex Police estate, dating back to the 1840’s. It contains protected cells; cells so old that they contain a mechanism much like a servant’s bell, allowing prisoners to summon an officer by pulling a cord which links to a small bell in the main office.
“One evening at about 2330hrs, the bell in the cells started ringing. I thought someone had come in and was winding me up but there was no one in the station at all apart from me. The bell cord is situated in the cells which were locked up, and you have to be in the cell to ring it. This happened 3 times in the space of 5 minutes.”

“I was the only one there and was moving throughout the building checking fire alarms. There was a very loud bang in the front office area near the cells. It felt like a door slam but there was no breeze or anyone around. It was possibly from outside but my hearing aids picked up echoes meaning it was inside, so I went to check the building to see if any windows were left open. None were open and nothing had been knocked on the floor and there was nobody around and no cars in the car park. My heart started to race and I left immediately – it was definitely from inside. I would never go there after dark now.”

The cells are the key to this site and the stories of the police station being haunted. The cell doors banging and the cell bells ringing are a phenomenon so well documented, experienced and known throughout the establishment, that even amongst the most hardy and experienced officers, there is not much doubt that there is something unusual happening at Thorpe-le-Soken. As one retired officer said to me:

“I don’t believe in ghosts or anything like that normally, but Thorpe-le-Soken is definitely haunted.”

To date, no explanation or story has been uncovered purporting to explain the array of activity which is evidence in that part of the police station. With a history stretching back over 150 years, it may never be possible to fully understand what story is attached to these apparently inexplicable happenings.

**Colchester Police Station: A monk’s habit?**
Colchester Police Station is one of the most modern police stations in the county and is located near one of the original Roman walls of Colchester. It is a surprising candidate for one of the most reputedly haunted police stations in the force.

“My father was based at “the new” Colchester Police Station around 20 years ago, having transferred from Grays. He relayed to me that many of the officers didn’t like the stairs down into the custody suite and they used to go through in quite a hurry because of “the monk”. My Dad is one of those “seen it all, done it all” people who thought it was all quite amusing. One evening he’d stayed late especially to nick one of his regulars who worked during the day. Having sorted out the paperwork in his office, he made his way down to custody via the stairs. Just as he took his first step down, all the lights went off. The temperature, he says, literally plummeted. In the very poor light, he saw what he can only describe as a hooded figure which appeared to be floating near to the bottom of the stairs. My Dad being my Dad just said aloud “Stop messing me around and put the bloody lights on!” At which point the figure faded and the lights indeed blinked on.”

“The monk” makes many appearances in the reports gathered. The reports are relatively consistent, and all make reference to the staircase leading to the custody suite. One report made mention of the lengths to which officers at Colchester went to be rid of the supposed apparition:

“One evening I was working late. It was dark and I went to walk from the front of the building to the back where the car park is situated, when I saw this monk floating over the stairs and moving down. The lights went off/on as I walked along the passage to the next set of stairs and the ghost appeared on the stairs again at the rear of the building it moved down under the stairs as I went up into the car park. I used to work in the same office as an officer who also saw this and called in a vicar to try and get rid of the ghost, but I hear people still see this today.”

The monk, however, is not the only alleged apparition in this relatively new station. Reports of a Roman Centurion abound from the custody suite, while a member of custody staff had an unpleasant experience in one of the first floor offices:

“One night when I was working as the Custody Sergeant, my detention officer asked if he could go upstairs to use a computer in one of the offices on the first floor to type some reports to which I agreed. Approximately half an hour later he came flying back into the custody almost taking the entrance door to the Custody area off its hinges. He was white and sweating profusely. I asked him what was wrong and he told me he had just seen a ghost. He explained he was typing at the computer when something caught his eye further down the office. He looked up to see a figure in white walk across the office and disappear around a corner. He did not recognise the person so got up and walked to where he had seen them go, only to realise it was a dead end with no doors to exit the office. There was no
trace of the person he had seen. He realised at that point he must have seen a ghost giving him a significant fright.”

The site of Colchester Police Station is interesting when considered with these reports; the centre of the building, which is currently an outdoors rest area, is a graveyard dating back to Roman times. Its location close to the Roman wall of Colchester is also of interest. Is it possible that the building works at the police station disturbed something from the past?

**Billericay Police Station: Officer still on duty?**

Of all of the police stations which we received reports about, Billericay Police Station stands out. It was mentioned more times than any other site, and crucially, the occurrences are attributed to a known source.

George Manning served with Essex County Constabulary between 1946 and 1976. Rising to the rank of Chief Inspector, he was based at Billericay Police Station for over 15 years at the end of his career. In November 1976, while on duty and en route to an incident, Chief Inspector Manning was involved in a road traffic collision along with another officer. He passed away as a result of his injuries on Boxing Day 1976.

“From personal experience, Billericay is a strange place to work, freezing cold in one end of the building; footsteps coming up the stairs when you’re in the report room or kitchen, then no-one appears; banging and crashing in the end corridor – not a place to be on your own that’s for sure! I’m not certain the exact story but I’m sure it’s an Inspector or Chief Inspector who either died very shortly before he was due to retire or very soon afterwards.”

“I have experienced two incidents at this police station which were particularly eerie and I am sure there will be other officers who have similar stories. One incident was where vehicle keys placed securely on a hook on the wall appeared to jump off the hook. There is no way they could have fallen and there was only me and another colleague in the office at the other end. No-one one had used those keys that evening. The second incident was where three of us were in the building upstairs and heard what sounded like the downstairs airlock door opening and slamming and footsteps. We were confused as no-one else should have been in the building, so we went down one set of stairs to investigate. There was then the
sound of running footsteps along the corridor to the other set of stairs (we even had our asps and cuffs out thinking there was an intruder) and followed the sound to the other stairs. There was no one there and the last sound we heard were footsteps overhead in the loft area! The building was searched and not a single other person was there! I am sceptical but that building gives you shivers down your spine and I would never be there alone. As far as the story goes, it is apparently haunted by an ex-police Chief Inspector who was killed on his last day on duty before his retirement. His name was possibly George Manning.”

“Various staff have mentioned strange feelings of ‘not being alone’ when they were alone in the building. It’s a large building essentially 2 buildings put together so it runs left to right with a long corridor. One night turn some years ago – about 4 years ago, I was finishing a shift. It was about 2am I recall, I was sitting at a computer finishing up. I was to my knowledge the only person in the building. From upstairs came the sound of doors being closed. A definite ‘clunk’ closure sound. This was to be fair a little disconcerting. I was tucked away in an office downstairs and had to go upstairs to put my kit away. Needless to say, it felt odd, like someone was in a nearby room. I hurried out and went home rapidly. I wasn’t the only person to have heard this. Other staff also reported a series of doors opening and closing too.”

Other unusual occurrences were reported about Billericay Police Station. These included items of stationery moving of their own accord and sudden drops in temperature after hearing a door close by itself or footsteps move nearby with no owner.

The reputation of Billericay Police Station as a haunted location has evolved and become so embedded and entwined with George Manning that he now appears to be a useful tool in explaining away possibly more than he would expect:

“And time something went missing or happened that wasn’t easily explained, George got the blame. A colleague of mine has been filing in the old cell block and heard loud tapping noises which George has been blamed for.”

**Epping Police Station: A tragic legacy?**

Another apparently attributable haunting is supposed to take place at Epping Police Station.

There are scant exact details available, but several reports allege that at some point in the past, a
Police Sergeant sadly took his own life in the custody suite. And since then, Epping Police Station has supposedly not been the same:

“Epping is reportedly haunted after a sergeant killed himself in the cells some years back. I have worked here on and off for years and I can vouch for a really, really loud bang in the middle of a very quiet night shift coming from the closed cell block.”

“Normally it’s the chairs being dragged along the floor in the canteen on the third floor, when you are the only one in the building. I hear this and race up the stairs and there is no one there. Strange groaning noises are heard in the corner of the CID room; they start off quite quiet then get louder and then stop, and then will start up again at any random time. In the past a male has been seen in the canteen but no-one knew who he was. When the two officers said to each other who was the man sitting in the corner, neither one knew who it was, they went back up the stairs almost instantly and he was nowhere to be see. A Sergeant did take his own life here so maybe it was him.”

Never Off Duty?

Two reports received were of particular note as they reflected a belief that the camaraderie which exists in the police does not necessarily end when we pass away.

The following report was received regarding Tilbury Police Station:

“During my time there (at Tilbury) as a Sergeant I heard some folk mention a belief that Tilbury Police Station was haunted, but I did not give it much thought. One evening I needed to write up some reports and decided to use one of the computers in the front office. It was probably around 2am and the front counter was closed to the public. I had been sat there for some minutes when I heard in the background the sound of boots walking into the custody area and towards the custody desk. They then walked away from the desk towards the cells. I looked up and then continued typing, thinking that at any minute one of my team would appear laden with some tapes or papers from the one of the stockpiles in the cell and needing a hand with doors, but after a few moments nobody emerged. It was then that I looked up and around me and realised that the entire old custody area was still in darkness
and to get in, someone would have needed to walk in the door behind me. I glanced down at my radio as it had fallen silent and then wandered upstairs. Looking around it confirmed what I had been aware of; none of my team were in and nor were any other officers in the station.

It may seem strange but I was not alarmed or afraid of the footsteps I had heard, as the overall feeling was that a fellow officer was likewise going about their duties. Some months later I mentioned this experience to an old custody Sergeant and he said that he too had heard the same thing once, as if an officer from years ago was bringing in one more prisoner, presenting them at the custody desk and walking them to their cell. The above incident has always stayed with me as, though it was a haunting of sorts, there was an odd sense of camaraderie as if the ghostly boots didn’t mean to cause alarm, just report for duty.”

As of writing, there is no information to suggest who it is that is supposed to be behind these events.

Finally, the following was received regarding Waltham Abbey Police Station:

“An old colleague of mine once saw a man on CCTV wearing a old-style black cloak in the car park of Waltham Abbey Police Station. Another time on leaving the police station to go home, and being the only person on duty there, he saw someone all in black in his rear view mirror. He got out to see who was ‘winding him up’ only to find nobody was in the car park.

A while later, I had a similar experience. That evening, I attended a call-out to a distressed elderly female in Epping Forest who had dementia. I attended single-crewed. After talking to her for a while, she asked me where the man was who I had come with. I said I had attended on my own. She then said: “No, you weren’t; you were with a man in a long black cloak.”

This time we have some limited information to suggest the story behind these occurrences, thanks to another report received regarding Waltham Abbey:

“Waltham Abbey is rife with ‘paranormal activity’ apparently, and is haunted by an old Metropolitan Police Sergeant, so I am told. I have heard some creepy things in there like foot-steps etc. but the stories I’ve heard include a penny flying off a desk, a copier machine
starting up by itself and printing things out. The story is that this Sergeant hung himself in custody. How true that is though is anybody’s guess.”

**The Policeman in the Graveyard**

So, to finish off, what are the details of the story we began this article with; Paul hiding in the graveyard? The following report was received from a retired officer regarding one of the more interesting Hallowe’en nights he experienced whilst serving with Essex Police...

“Back in the 1980’s, I was a Sergeant at Ongar Police Station and I also supervised several residential police officers (RBO’s) who lived in the villages surrounding Ongar. One such officer was Paul who was the RBO for the Stanford Rivers area.

On Paul’s beat was Stanford Rivers Church which was situated in a very dark and rural location. It had the reputation of being haunted which made it very attractive to ghost hunters from all around. One of the downsides of this situation was that the church was always visited at Hallowe’en, and it was common for grave stones to be smashed or defaced.

On this particular Hallowe’en night, Paul decided that he wasn’t going to tolerate this on-going damage and he decided to hide himself up in the church graveyard and jump out and detain anyone caught causing damage. Quite a brave move actually.

About 2200hrs that evening we got a direct call from Paul (you could do that in those days). From his voice he was clearly much shaken and he was asking for back up to go into the church. We got to him as fast as we could and found Paul very shaken. He told us he had been hiding behind a gravestone when he saw a figure dressed in dark clothing ‘glide’ up the pathway and go into the church. There was then a flash of light in the church and a scream as the whole area plunged into darkness.

I must admit, somewhat reluctantly, three of us approached the church and looked through the door. We could see a candle flickering at the back of the church. Then, suddenly, a figure appeared out of the darkness and said, “Who’s there?”.

As you can imagine, a change of underpants was required all round.
So, the explanation? The figure seen ‘gliding’ up the footpath was the vicar. He had a very long gown on which covered his feet and gave the appearance of gliding over the ground. He had attended the church late at night for the same reason Paul had. Unbeknownst to Paul, the church, due to lack of maintenance, was having problems with the electrical wiring and there was no money available to rewire the premises. When the vicar turned the lights on in the church they flashed and fused plunging the whole premises into darkness. The action also gave the vicar an electric shock causing him to cry out in pain.

Well, there it is; you couldn’t make it up could you.”

These reports are just some of the many reports I received regarding our (supposedly) haunted police stations. I also received reports regarding other locations not in this article, including:

- Force Headquarters, Chelmsford (A Block and Essex Police College)
- Saffron Walden Police Station
- Leigh-on-Sea Police Station
- Pitsea Police Station
- Kelvedon Police Station
- Weathersfield (Force Storage Facility)
- Great Dunmow Police Station (old location)
- Witham Police Station
- Brentwood Police Station
- Southminster Police Station
- Halstead Police Station
- Rayleigh Police Station
- Harwich Police Station

The truth is out there!

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**Visit Us**

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