



THE OLD COWES GHOST TRAIL

Start - The Parade

1) Marine Court/IW Model Railway Exhibition

A scruffy little brown and white Jack Russell dog haunts this apartment building, once a famous hotel. The 200-year-old Drover's Marine Hotel, later the Royal Marine Hotel, was one of the most prestigious in Cowes. Its guest book reads like a Who's Who of European Royalty. In its hey-day it was *the* place in Cowes to stay for the summer yachting season. Now known as Marine Court and converted into apartments and offices there are few traces of its earlier elegance. The little dog haunts the Isle of Wight Model Railway Exhibition where it appears during the early summer months and is sometimes seen, sitting silently, between the shop and rail display room.

Walk behind the bandstand to Bath Road

2) Kendall's Fine Arts

A ghost from the Island's Tudor times has been a regular visitor at the old Copper Kettle Restaurant in Bath Road - now a fine arts gallery run by former TV personality Kenneth Kendall. The ruddy-faced spectre known as Tom would appear through the wall leading from the stairs to the cellar. He has a partially severed right hand, burned and sealed in the time-honoured way with such wounds. His hair is sandy coloured, his face clean-shaven; his costume a leather tunic and large puffed sleeves slashed in the fashion of the time. He wears a sword, leather belt, puffed pantaloons, hose and leather shoes with pointed toes. Why he haunts the building is a mystery. Built in the 18th century as a saloon, it was a favourite place for Navy press-gangs who gathered a rich harvest there. But Tudor Tom is clearly a spirit from an earlier time. Was he a soldier at the nearby Cowe castle, now the Royal Yacht Squadron?

Look across the road to Trinity Theatre

3) Trinity Theatre

Trinity Theatre which is set back from Bath Road, is the home of the Cowes Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, who are quite used to the pranks of their ghosts. It's company policy to check all props before every performance, as they have a nasty habit of disappearing or being moved around the stage. Supernatural activity seems to be centred around a storage room and the lighting box above. That room is always cold and figures are seen there even when it is locked. Then there's the mystery of the bloodstained footprints which sometimes appear on the auditorium's wooden floor, made, it's said, by a man who died in the Blitz when the theatre was a Red Cross post. However, phantom footsteps may belong to a ghostly guest artiste who treads the boards at Trinity because his own theatre has gone. Albert DuBois recited monologues at the old Shanklin Pier Theatre in the 1890s and died there. Since then he's made several come-backs. People heard his footsteps - always seven - climbing the stage. There were even plans to issue the ghost with his own Equity card! When the theatre closed in 1979 its fittings were sold. Those plush red velvet seats went to.... Trinity Theatre, where it seems that Albert's ghost still treads the boards.

Follow Bath Road to Watch House Lane

4) Union Inn

In the late 1700s most of the wooden houses of old Cowes were pulled down and replaced with grander residences. However in Watch House Lane, three fishermen's cottages survived to form part of the Union Inn, a charmingly historic pub, where, in days gone by, on the dot of 9.30pm footsteps were heard climbing the old wooden stairs. Where the staircase ended in a blank wall, the tap tapping sound continued. Six hours later at 3.30am, they would descend again, accompanied by a bitter penetrating coldness. Some people glimpsed a shadowy figure coming from the attics. Others would smell the ghostly whiff of old-fashioned pipe smoke. One terrified customer ran screaming from the ladies' toilets after walking into the ghost of a bearded man there. Legend tells of a sea-light which once stood on a tower above the inn to guide fisherman safely home. The innkeeper's wife kept it burning when her husband was at sea. But one stormy night tragedy struck when it went out and her husband and several other men drowned. Her guilty ghost continued to climb those stairs to keep the phantom lamp burning. Few believed this fanciful old tale - until the remains of an ingenious system of glass lenses was

discovered at The Union. These ancient lenses were set into each floor so those below could check the sea-light was still burning...

Follow road which becomes High Street

5) The Prospect/Max Aitken Museum

'The Prospect', one of the town's most famous houses was once the home of Sir Max Aitken, son of newspaper magnate Lord Beaverbrook. It now houses the Sir Max Aitken Museum collection of marine memorabilia, but was once the refuge of Royalty. Although the refugee King Louis Philippe of France is long dead, his ghost still potters about the 200-year-old former sail loft where he stayed for a time in exile. The unfortunate Louis Philippe, the last of the Bourbons, was nicknamed 'La Poire' because of his large pear-shaped head. Laura Levi, Sir Max's daughter, has seen his ghost several times in the museum. "He's a big, fat harmless fellow, who usually comes out at night. I have seen him lots of times. He sometimes appears when we are having parties." Overthrown in 1848, the portly and pompous 74-year-old king fled France and stayed at The Prospect. During Cowes Week, Royal visitors are frequently entertained there - perhaps that's why he feels so at home. If you're keen on maritime history you will enjoy the museum - but keep a weather eye open - in case a portly old gentleman with a pear-shaped head tries to grant you an audience.

A few yards along the High Street look for The Three Crowns

6) Three Crowns

When the ancient Three Crowns inn, built in 1475 as the Plough and Furrow, collapsed during building works in 2002, the pub ghosts became temporarily homeless. One of them, Uncle Charlie, who lived on the first floor of the Three Crowns regularly walked along the corridor to the bathroom - but was never heard coming back! The second spirit, a lady in a grey dress, would appear behind the bar, walk right through it, across the room and disappear through a wall into the cellar - much to the astonishment of staff and customers.

Just past the ferry terminal look for the NatWest Bank

7) Old National Provincial Bank

At 104 High Street (now the NatWest Bank) stood the old National Provincial Bank until its demolition in the mid 1960s. Above the bank the four-storey building was divided into flats. Here the ghost of an elderly lady frightened a couple of newly-weds who moved into her old flat. In what was the old lady's bedroom things would vanish - only to turn up again weeks later. Some mornings they were even woken to find their bedroom curtains being drawn back by an unseen hand.

Near the Marina entrance in the High Street is the haunted Anchor pub

8) The Anchor

The spirit of Harry the stable boy haunts The Anchor, run by Chris Troup, which is one of the oldest pubs in Cowes. Watch out for his melancholy ghost in the stable bar behind the inn. Many years ago, Harry is said to have hanged himself there on the bale hoist - which can still be seen.

Climb a slight hill from the High Street

9) Shooters Hill

For almost 150 years the Jolliffe family ran their shoe business in Shooters Hill with Queen Victoria and the Royal Family among their customers. When the original shop burned down in 1915, this handsome Art Nouveau replacement was built. Although the shoe shop closed in 1991 the building itself has a Grade II listing. A little ghost named Ursula haunts properties in Shooters Hill. At one, the spirit of a young girl with straight blonde hair was often seen by the owners who even bought a Ouija board to find out why she was haunting them. Lala, as she likes to be called, wears a black Victorian dress, a long white pinafore trimmed in broderie anglais and little black boots. Lala is aware she has died, but doesn't want to 'move on'. She's fascinated by make-up, loves to play with cosmetics, spraying perfume, and aerosols with gay abandon. Lala pops into the NSPCC charity shop too, inspecting clothes and moving hangers. She also likes to play in Cowes Pottery and Crafts, moving freely between the buildings, bringing coins with her. Several 20p pieces have vanished from one house and appeared in the shop, sometimes falling from mid-air. At night in the Beauty Matters salon above, Lala has been known to play with hair spray, rollers and shampoo, leaving them piled in the middle of the stockroom floor.

Walk back down the hill, turn into Cross Street and look for Middleton Terrace

10) Middleton Terrace/ The Thrunge

Ghosts of long dead sailors and the ladies of the night who plied their trade here with the many visiting seamen must surely haunt this little alley. This was a notorious 'low' part of the town, not quite a slum, but not very respectable either! Known locally as *'The Thrunge'* the origins of this quaint name are unknown, but it does appear in the official town guide as late as 1915.

At this point, you can retrace your steps through the High Street to your start point on the Parade. Alternatively walk up both Carvel Lane and Terminus Road to the junction. Turn right into Union Road and left into Church Road.

11) St Mary's Churchyard

As you cross the churchyard look for a headstone near the western wall which reads: *Sacred to the memory of John Sutton who fell in a duel near this town on 16th December 1917 aged 22 years.* This duel was fought in an area of Northwood Park known as the Riding School, which adjoined the churchyard. The quarrel between two men from a passenger ship, weather-bound in nearby Cowes Roads, which arose out of a card game, was forced upon the unwilling John Sutton by his older adversary. Denied justice and life it's no surprise that his unquiet spirit was said to haunt the place where he met his untimely end.

Leave church yard by the rear gate

12) Northwood Park

The sound of children at play is common here. Their screams and laughter are often heard, especially at dusk. But *these* youngsters have no homes or warm beds to go to...for they are ghosts. Some locals won't walk here after dark. They're afraid of what they may see or hear. The ghosts, boys of eight or nine, play on a huge old tree, swinging up and down on its branches. They are dressed in old-fashioned school uniform; short trousers, blazers and school caps. In 1918, several children at a nearby private school died during the epidemic of Spanish Influenza, which killed hundreds of thousands worldwide. Could it be that these spirits who play on after death are child victims of that killer flu?

Take the main path out of the park leading towards the sea

13) Northwood House

Built in 1837 by George Ward and attributed to John Nash, this grand residence was given to the people of Cowes in 1929. Between 1902 and 1906, it was occupied by French Benedictine nuns and the ghost of one these sisters is seen flitting through the park at night. In cellars under the house, the ghost of a grinning pirate appears, dressed in muddy black sea boots, a striped jersey and thick black trousers. A scarf around his head is knotted to one side and he sports a single, huge gold earring. Aged about thirty, Henry, as he is known, has a small, black beard, and around his neck wears a medallion. Old stone tunnels under the park were once used by smugglers to move and store their contraband. One tunnel ran from the cellars to an old gatehouse at the top of Castle Hill, emerging near the beach where the illicit brandy, tobacco and fine wines were brought ashore at dead of night, by the likes of Henry and his companions. On a still night the sound of boxes and kegs being moved around in the empty cellars can sometimes be heard. Locals just laugh, "Henry's busy again" they say!

Go down the steps to Castle Hill and follow this road back to The Parade

14) Royal Yacht Squadron

The world's most prestigious yacht club, the Royal Yacht Squadron boasts two ghosts. The old West Cowe Castle, built in 1540 by Henry VIII, once played a strategic part in the Island's defences. The club itself has "always numbered in its ranks the wealthiest and most eminent of the nobility and gentry". The ghost of a tall, young soldier in tunic, breeches and long boots, carrying a tall pillbox hat under his arm, marches through a ground floor room and disappears. The other spirit which roams the Squadron, opening locked doors, is said to be a previous owner of the castle, the Marquis of Anglesey. Waterloo veteran and the Military Governor of the Island, he made Cowes Castle his residence and died there in May 1854.

THE END

Gay Baldwin© 2003

THE OLD COWES GHOST TRAIL

The Isle of Wight is reputedly the most haunted place in Britain. This small island is home to a gallery of ghosts, spooks and spirits, which pop up in the most unlikely places.

Using this **FREE** booklet and map you can take a self-guided walk around the streets and alleyways to discover the darker side of Old Cowes.

The entire walk should take you approximately an hour, but if you are feeling less energetic or have walking difficulties, or if time is limited, you can miss out the visit to Northwood Park (stories 12-14) and return to your starting point via Watchhouse Lane.

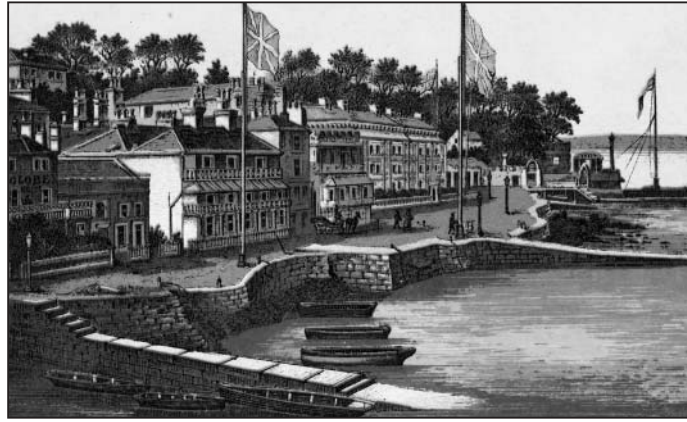
This guide is produced by Cowes Town Council, in conjunction with local paranormal researcher and writer Gay Baldwin, and is based on extracts from her popular Isle of Wight Ghost Books.

The books shown here are available from Island bookshops and Tourist Information Centres.

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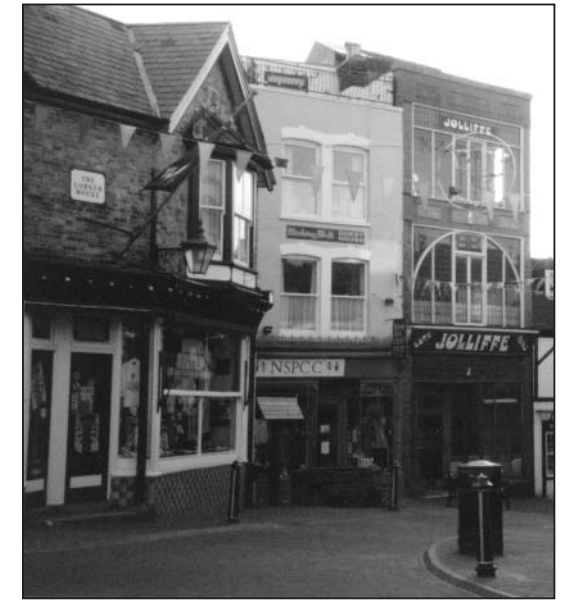
Cowes Parade in early Victorian times



Early twentieth century view of Cowes High Street



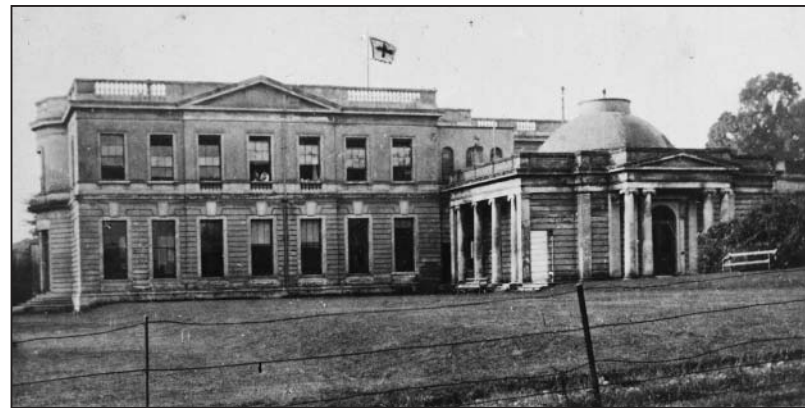
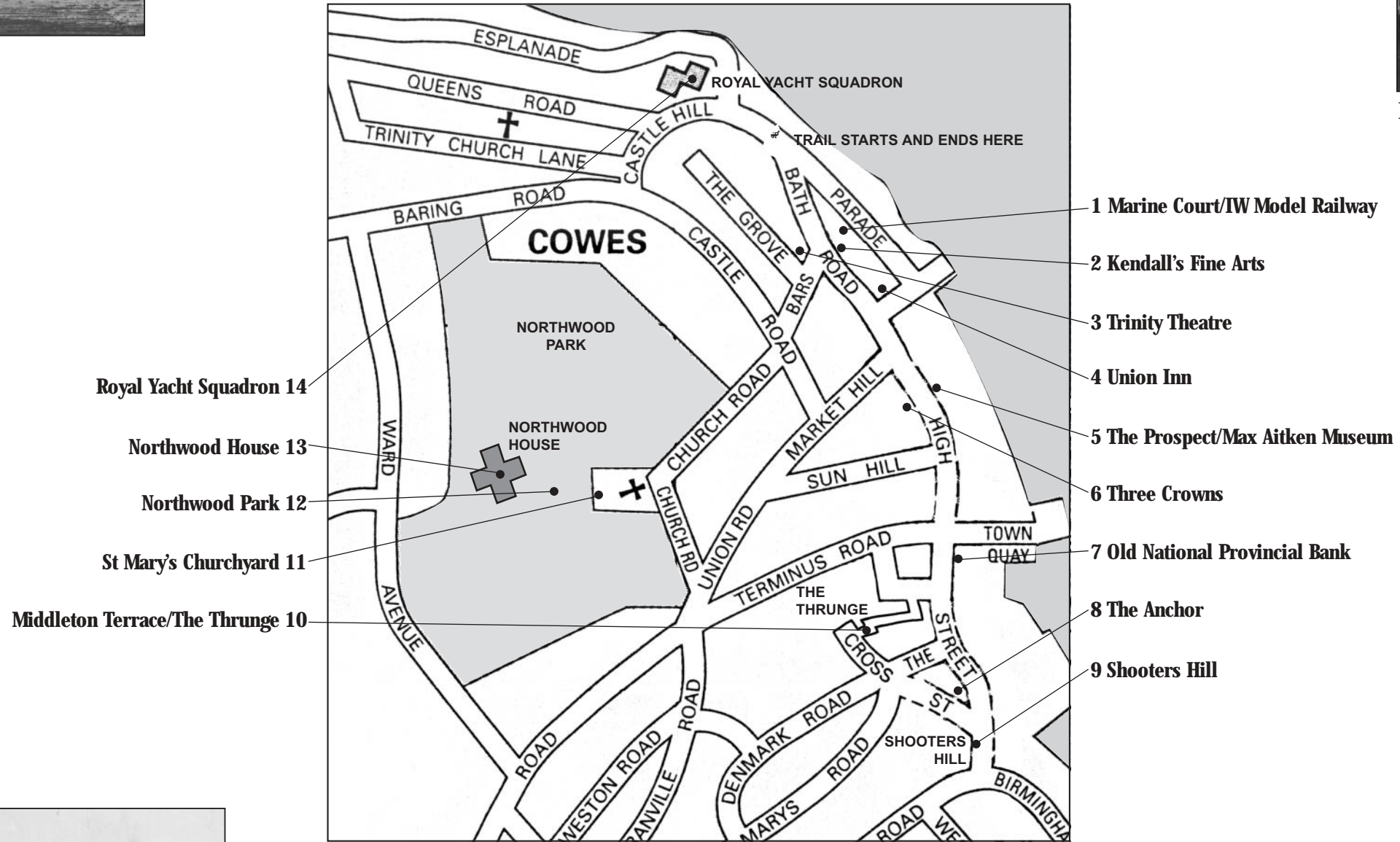
Blood-stained footprint at Trinity Theatre



Haunted Shooters Hill



Cowes viewed from the air in the 1980's



Northwood House in 1915



The old West Cowe Castle, now the Royal Yacht Squadron



The old Royal Marine Hotel, now Marine Court



The Union Inn at Watch House Lane