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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Laying Pluckley's Ghosts: Frederick Sanders and the Origins of the 'Most Haunted Village in England', 1939–79

Simon Moreton

Abstract

The village of Pluckley in the British county of Kent has enjoyed a reputation for being 'the most haunted village in England' for more than seventy years. Popular books on the paranormal have featured the village and its alleged ghosts since the late 1960s and the total number of hauntings now stands at between twelve and sixteen. This article uses archival research to piece together the origins of these stories. It traces their earliest known written recordings to the work of a local historian named Frederick William Thomas Sanders during the period 1939–60 and follows Sanders's stories into the 1970s to map their evolution and proliferation. The article offers historical context for a 'haunted village' for folklorists interested in research on ghosts as a cultural, social, and historical phenomenon, as well as providing evidence of a means by which ghost stories can be produced and reproduced as a form of contemporary folklore.

Introduction

The phenomenon of ghosts—the apparent reappearance of the (usually) dead (see Price 1960) before the living, often associated with a specific location although sometimes attached to a specific individual or group—has long been part of human culture (Davies 2007). Stories about such encounters appear in myths, legends, oral traditions, and plays from antiquity into the modern era, where contemporary forms of literature such as the novel, or media such as television, radio, or feature films, have become vehicles for their evolution and dissemination (see for example Rodgers 2019; Davies 2007).

Within the UK there remains widespread popular interest in ghost stories (Cowdell 2011), and it is perhaps no surprise that towns, villages, cities, and even administrative districts vying to be afforded the title 'most haunted' are features of the cultural landscape. The UK has several localities in contention for such accolades, with the village of Pluckley in Kent, the city of York, Presbury and Warrington in Cheshire, and the London borough of Barnet all having been accorded the status—often by

representatives from their own communities (Davies 2007, 64). These places celebrate their reputations for having a high concentration of ghost stories attached to them, or as Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson put it, for being locations, 'where the medley of alleged apparitions is notable for quantity, although not narrative quality' (Westwood and Simpson 2006, 136). How stories and places become intertwined in this way is of interest to contemporary folklorists as the process alludes to complex interactions between placemaking, local historical knowledge, and ritual, and connect us with changing attitudes to memorialization, life, death, and spirituality.

The purpose of this article is to provide an examination of this process by way of an historical account of the origins, documentation, and dissemination of ghost stories relating to Pluckley, 'The Most Haunted Village in England' (Sanders 1950b). The task of unpicking how the village's dozen ghost stories came to be written down and shared appears not to have been definitively completed elsewhere and will contribute to our understanding of how modern ghostlore emerges, evolves, and gains cultural traction.

The article proceeds as follows. First, it gives an overview of Pluckley and its ghostlore as it stands at present, and lays out evidence that the first written records of nearly all the village's stories were produced by a local man named Frederick Sanders. The article moves on to provide a detailed account of Sanders's original writing about each haunting, situating these stories in a very broad typology: those stories that existed in the community prior to their being written down but that have no proven relationship to historical persons or events, and those which commemorate verifiable occurrences in the village, notably tragic or untimely deaths. Where possible, the latter stories are contextualized by original archival research, cross-referencing narratives with genealogical records such as birth, death, and marriage certificates; census data; parish registers; and local historical newspaper archives. The aim of this exercise is not to suggest that these latter accounts are any more or less 'true' than others but, rather, to highlight the role local historical knowledge plays in the negotiation of objective and subjective narrative elements within ghost stories (Hanks 2011).

The article next traces how these narratives began to gain traction in local and national media from the mid-1950s into the 1970s, noting when, where, and how stories not collected by Sanders entered the record, including those which may be fabrications or with no identifiable historical origin, but which have nonetheless become part of the collective narrative associated with the village. This is followed by a discussion of how Sanders's interest in local history, scientific ghost-hunting, and spiritualism established a tension at the heart of his work, reflecting on how this contributed to the emergence of a series of inconsistencies in his storytelling which may have set the conditions not only for their proliferation but also their continuing evolution in the broader public sphere.

Pluckley: The Village with a Dozen Ghosts

Pluckley is a small English village situated on the northern edge of the Kentish Weald between Maidstone and Ashford. It was an Anglo-Saxon settlement, boasts several historic buildings including a fourteenth-century church, and found fame in the

1990s as the setting for a popular television adaptation of H. E. Bates's novel *The Darling Buds of May* and its sequels. The village also enjoys a reputation as 'the most haunted village in England', a somewhat contested accolade first accorded to the village in 1950 (Sanders 1950b) and bolstered by a mention—although not an actual award—in the 1989 *Guinness Book of World Records.*[1]

The village's ghosts are rumoured to include the spectre of a highwayman run through with a sword while hiding in a hollow oak; the screaming ghost of a man who died in a quarry; a ghostly miller who appears on stormy nights; the shade of the 'Red Lady' and another woman in modern dress, both of whom haunt a graveyard; the 'White Lady' who haunts the site of a demolished mansion; the spectres of a schoolmaster and a military man, both of whom hanged themselves; a phantom coach and horses heard but not seen on a local road; the shape of an old woman who died after accidentally setting herself on fire; a spectral monk; and the revenant of a woman who poisoned herself in a local house.

Of note to folklorists is the relatively recent pedigree of these stories. In 2000, journalist Julia Stuart, visiting the village for *The Independent* newspaper, quoted a local resident as saying that 'the Pluckley ghosts have no ancestry at all … If you look in pre-war guidebooks there is no mention of it being the most haunted village in England' (Stuart 2000, 7). Pluckley's ghosts are indeed absent from a sample of early publications featuring the village, including Reverend Ashton Oxenden's autobiography *The History of My Life* (1891) in which he writes about his twenty years as vicar at Pluckley, and travel books such as *Highways and Byways in Kent* by Walter Jerrold (1907), *Unknown Kent* by Donald Maxwell (1921), and *A Saunter through Kent with Pen and Pencil* by Charles Igglesden (1924). The latter was compiled from a series of newspaper articles first published in the *Kentish Express* and the article which features Pluckley discusses ghosts in nearby locations—but not in the village itself (Igglesden 1903).

As we shall see, it was indeed during the 1950s that Pluckley's ghost stories began to surface locally, before gaining wider national recognition across the 1960s and 1970s through what Paul Darby and Niall Finneran (2022) have called 'ghost gazetteers', books aimed at drawing the attention of a newly mobile public to predominantly rural areas in search of ghosts. These volumes were additions to a burgeoning travel-writing movement that accompanied the increased access to the countryside afforded by increasingly affordable (although still relatively exclusive) motorcar travel in the interwar period and immediately after World War II. These guides, including those produced by Shell, the Automobile Association, and Reader's Digest, recast the (predominantly) English landscape as a site of both consumption and enchantment, while simultaneously generating homogenized representations of England and its inhabitants for the interested tourist (Brace 2003; Matless 1993, 2002).

Central to this movement was a sense of 'reconnection' with 'forgotten' rural communities and traditions. This frequently relied on evocations of historical and regional narratives, and connecting rural activities to long-standing traditions, superstitions, and folklore. By the 1960s the genre was evolving in response to counter-cultural interest in the links between these themes and the paranormal and esoteric aspects of the landscape

like leys and ghosts. It was from this trend, Darby and Finneran (2022) suggest, that the 'ghost gazetteers' emerged.

The gazetteers themselves were not uniform in scope or ambition. The aim of Andrew Green's *Our Haunted Kingdom*, for instance, was to 'provide a major selection of genuine hauntings experienced in the last 25 years' (Green 1973, 12), discounting sites with no recently reported sightings. Anthony D. Hippisley Coxe's *Haunted Britain* (1973), on the other hand, sought to offer a more comprehensive record, including both contemporary and legendary paranormal happenings as well as selections of folklore and local superstitions. What united the genre, however, was their format. The books were frequently designed to act as a travel guide, providing readers with information about when and how to visit haunted sites, how to reach them by public transport or by car, and, in some instances, where to stay while visiting. This mirrored the format established by earlier travel guides explicitly presenting a regionalized vision of the UK, where local curiosities, historical narratives, and folklore were made relevant to contemporary audiences by offering an explicit connection to a landscape which could be sought out and consumed.

The first ghost gazetteer to mention Pluckley was Jack Hallam in *The Ghost Tour: A Guidebook to Haunted Houses within Easy Reach of London* (1967), followed by Peter Underwood's *Gazetteer of British Ghosts* (1971), Green's *Our Haunted Kingdom* and Hippisley Coxe's *Haunted Britain* (both 1973), Marc Alexander's *Phantom Britain* (1975), and Eric Maple's *Supernatural England* (1977); a younger audience encountered Pluckley's ghosts in the same year via *All About Ghosts*, published by Usborne as part of its 'World of the Unknown' series (Maynard 1977). Coverage continued across multiple media thereafter.

Despite this coverage, Pluckley's reputation in materialist parapsychological circles was less concrete, with corroborating sightings or experiences involving the ghosts often conspicuous by their absence. Visiting Pluckley in 1971 for the *News of the World* while reviewing Underwood's book, for example, journalist William Rankine suggested it had been twenty-five years since anyone claimed to have seen a ghost in the village (Turner 1971). Alan Bignell made a similar observation about the village's lack of ghosts, writing that it had become 'more and more difficult to find anyone who will admit to having seen or heard any of them' (Bignell 1983, 100), and more recent visitors having been similarly disappointed (Chesshyre 2010).

This has led to media speculation about the stories' provenance. An article in the *Sunday Telegraph* (Clark 1992) recorded a suggestion that the stories had been concocted in the 1950s by a group of locals. This theory was echoed by a resident whose father was born in the village in 1918 and apart from military service had lived there all his life, and who 'had never heard of any ghost stories before World War II, and that the stories began after journalists … were visiting in the Black Horse [Inn] one evening and the locals were telling them tales—possibly for free beer' (name withheld, pers. comm., 13 December 2020). In another twist, television actor and later BBC Radio 2 DJ Desmond Carrington told Julia Stuart that he was responsible for fabricating all but one of the stories:

> I lived in Pluckley during the 1950s and while I was in the ITV series *Emergency Ward 10*, a freelance journalist named Bill Evans came to my home to do a feature on me for the *TV Times*. He wanted an 'angle' on the village and asked if there was a ghost. I said I'd heard of one—a

> 'White Lady'—and we ended up concocting a whole string of them just for the article. (Stuart 2000, 7)

'Pluckley Was My Playground': The Work of Frederick Sanders

Given the unclear origins of Pluckley's ghost stories, it might be tempting to assume that they were indeed a product of local fabrication during the 1950s. However, their origins lie not with Carrington, nor a cartel of intoxicated locals—although they all may have had a hand in the later evolution and promulgation of the tales—but instead in the writing of a local man named Frederick William Thomas Sanders (1908–96) from 1946 onwards.

Born in Pluckley, Frederick Sanders was the son of Frederick Sr, an RAF Sergeant, and Alice (née Pile), a housewife. Alice's family hailed from Pluckley, and it was here that the Sanderses returned to live in September 1919 during Frederick Sr's military service at RAF Uxbridge. Frederick Jr left school at around fifteen years of age, going on to work at a poultry farm, before eventually moving to Chatham where he worked on the dockyards.

It was during this period that he wrote books on Kentish local dialects, graveyards, and natural history (see Sanders 1935, 1936, 1937, 1950a, 1964). He was an avid correspondent with the local press, writing letters on matters of dialect and nicknames (Sanders 1953), as well as writing obituaries for village residents (for example Sanders 1951, 1956). He was also from a young age an enthusiast of the paranormal and styled himself a 'ghost-hunter or psychical researchist' (Sanders 2021, 177), and it was a combination of this esoteric interest with his work as an amateur historian and memoirist that provides us with the earliest written accounts of Pluckley's ghost stories.

Sanders began ghost-hunting in 1939, and in 1946 he wrote and self-published *Psychical Research: Haunted Kent*, a typewritten account of fourteen ghost-hunts he conducted in the county between February 1939 and December 1940 (Sanders 1946). Two of these hunts occurred at St Nicholas's Church in Pluckley, one of which was covered at the time by a journalist from *The Daily Herald*. This feature was published on 24 July 1939, representing the earliest written mention of any of Pluckley's ghosts I have found to date. In the article, the reporter comments on Sanders's apparent lack of success in observing a ghost, stating glibly that 'it may be that the ghost hunters would have heard or seen more had they waited longer, for when the church clock struck midnight it was only 11 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time, and surely such long-established ghosts as that of [The Red Lady] do not observe Summer Time?' ('On Ghost Hunt at Midnight (B.S.T.)' 1939, 3). Sanders omits to mention this visit from a reporter in his own published account.

The next written mention of a ghost in the village appeared in February 1948, when Sanders wrote to the *Kentish Express* to discuss the matter of owls being mistaken for ghosts on Mill Hill (Sanders 1948), and in December 1950 he provided an article to the same paper, listing ten ghosts (or more accurately, nine ghosts and Satan himself, summoned by dancing three times around the aptly named 'Devil's

Bush') which haunted Pluckley. With the exception of the 'Red Lady' and the ghost of Mill Hill, this is the first time Pluckley's other ghost stories appear in print. Also of note is that Sanders describes Pluckley as the 'most haunted village in England' in what is almost certainly the first instance of the term being associated with the village (Sanders 1950b).

Sanders continued to deepen his interests in ghosts, sporadically writing paranormally inclined fiction for the *Kentish Express* during the 1950s and 1960s. His stories were narrated by a local character named 'Big Little' from the fictional village of Oakley-on-the-Hill (see Sanders 1960, 1962, 1963). It was during this period that Sanders released his memoir, *Pluckley Was My Playground* (Sanders 2021) in which he details his childhood and teenage exploits in the village between 1919 and 1926. The book, self-published in a very small edition and distributed to friends, family, and local libraries, was assembled from notes first written by Sanders between 1927 and 1931. It is a nostalgic memoir, composed of recollections of childhood in England's rural idyll, tramping through fields, exploring ponds and forests, playing games, building dens, documenting local flora and fauna, remembering local characters, and documenting local ghost stories.

Sanders's Ghosts Explored

This handful of sources—letters to the press, newspaper articles, and self-published books—are the earliest known written sources for nearly all of Pluckley's contemporary ghost stories and supply the narrative framework through which these hauntings are still described today. The stories fall broadly into two categories: apocryphal stories whose origins have been forgotten but which represent a form of local legend, and those which are drawn directly from traumatic or notable events that occurred within living memory of Sanders or his sources. This latter category may be understood as a form of memorate; Cowdell (2006) draws attention to the term in relation to ghost stories, noting that it is broadly applied to accounts that have the potential to become understood as legends or other folkloric genres, but which may fall short in specific characteristics, such as narrative form or relationship to tradition (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1974). In this sense, these stories represent a kind of emergent folklore.

Legendary Ghosts of Pluckley

In *Pluckley Was My Playground* Sanders credits his grandfather, Jesse Pile, with the first of two stories associated with the Dering family, landed gentry who had owned much of Pluckley and its surrounds since at least the sixteenth century. This story—'closely guarded' for many years by the Pile family (Sanders 1946, 30)—relates to the haunting of St Nicholas's Church. Sanders writes in his memoir that 'several hundreds of years ago' (Sanders 2021, 181) the exceptionally beautiful Lady Dering died and was buried by her grieving husband, who placed a red rose on her chest and encased her in a coffin made of seven layers of lead. She was interred in the family

vault at the village church and, Sanders claimed, could still be seen wandering the graveyard.

In his 1950 article Sanders refers to her as 'The Red Lady' (Sanders 1950b), and in *Haunted Kent* he describes two separate trips he made to investigate this haunting (Sanders 1946). The first he carried out in July 1939 with Douglas Bennett, a twenty-year-old colleague, and the second he undertook alone in October of the same year. He writes that on his first visit to St Nicholas's Church, he saw lights in the belfry, and Bennett heard a woman's voice in the churchyard (Sanders 1946), although these details do not appear in the newspaper article produced by the visiting reporter ('On Ghost Hunt at Midnight (B.S.T.)' 1939, 3). On his second trip, Sanders noted auditory phenomena inside the church itself; he would go on to declare in 1959 that the Red Lady had been laid after a visit to the churchyard by a local ghost-hunting group, during which the spirit 'escaped through a woman member of the party, who gave this release at grave danger to herself' ('Pluckley Ghost is "Now at Rest"' 1959, 1).

Sanders also alleged that a 'White Lady' haunted the site of Surrenden Dering, the Dering family seat. The mansion burned down in 1952, but in the early 1900s it was being leased to Walter Winans, an American game hunter, Olympic champion shooter, and millionaire. According to Sanders, Winans sat up one night in his library, 'to try to lay the ghost of the White Lady' and 'he did encounter this famous county apparition, firing his revolver at her, the bullets passing through her wraithlike form as she disappeared through a shelf on the walls' (Sanders 2021, 176–77).

Sanders does not record his source for this story which first appeared in Sanders (1950b), but a letter written by a man named Mark Tiffen to the *Kentish Express* in 1959 implies that it was known locally. Tiffen reported that his mother had worked at the manor at the time of Winan's encounter and she had told her son that 'several visitors packed and left hurriedly on being told of the appearance of this lady. She was alleged to have gone to the nurseries to bid her children goodnight when she slipped and fell, crashing to her death at the foot of the nursery staircase' (Tiffen 1959, 21).

The next ghost recorded by Sanders is that of a figure dressed sometimes in white and sometimes in black that was reputed to haunt the site of Pluckley's old smock mill. The windmill was built in 1820 on a hill overlooking the village and was used for most of its life to grind cereals. It was struck by lightning on 16 August 1831, but subsequently rebuilt. According to Sanders, it was again out of commission by the 1920s, after which time he writes that the miller, Richard 'Dicky' Buss,[2] was using the building as a storehouse. The building finally burned down after another lightning strike in April 1939.[3] Sanders does not attribute a source to this tale, but his 1948 letter on the matter of owls being mistaken for ghosts in the remains of the mill implies that he was responding to an established local belief.

The scepticism expressed in his letter is not present in his 1950 article (Sanders 1950b) in which he mentions a ghost, but it is expressed again in his memoir, where he describes how he and his friends played in the mill during its final years. Once, while rooting around in the building, something grasped the hand of one of his companions. Despite their initial fears, this turned out not to be a ghost but instead a bird trap with its jaws wrapped in cloth. This belonged to the miller's son, Charles—

known as 'Dusty' to Sanders and his friends—who lived in a 'little hut on wheels with an iron chimney sticking up from its roof' in Park Wood behind the mill (Sanders 2021, 9). Dusty trapped and trained birds; the device that caught Sanders's friend was designed to safely capture owls which Dusty would then tame and sell.

Two further stories from Sanders are less detailed. The first was 'The Colonel', who was alleged to have hanged himself in Park Wood. In his memoir, Sanders credits his schoolteacher, Henry Turff as his source for this tale. Sanders claimed that when he was young villagers would avoid a path through the woods at night on account of their fear of the Colonel's spectre (Sanders 2021, 17). The second was 'The Highwayman', whose story Sanders tells in his memoir (Sanders 2021, 144). The legend he reported was of that of a highwayman, supposedly killed in the hollow oak from which he used to ambush passers-by. Although Sanders details his own adventures climbing into the tree itself, he mentions no ghost: it is only in his 1950 article that he connects a haunting to the legend, and once more no source is given (Sanders 1950b).

The final 'ghost' Sanders records in this category appears in Sanders (1950b) and is not actually a haunting. Rather, it relates to a local legend about the 'Devil's Bush', the remains of a tree or shrub that stood at the eastern edge of nearby Smarden Woods.[4] Sanders claimed that dancing around the stump a number of times and chanting the appropriate rhyme would lead to the appearance of the Devil. A local resident confirmed that this story predated Sanders, claiming that his parents had told him in the 1950s that if 'you went round this stump three times backwards the devil would come out and get you' (name withheld, pers. comm., 13 December 2020).

Memorates as Ghostlore

The four remaining stories recorded by Sanders relate to events that occurred in the village in the fifty years or so preceding his return in 1919. They collapse together first-hand and second-hand knowledge of traumatic events within the village and its surrounds into the form of ghost stories, but often without any reference to witnesses or specific encounters. In this sense, they appear to function as memorates, a kind of proto-folklore in the process of shifting from personal knowledge to shared narratives, told and retold locally.

The first story of this kind is that of the 'Watercress Woman', who makes her first appearance in Sanders (1950b). He writes in *Pluckley Was My Playground* that 'within the memory of my Grandmother Pile,[5] an old lady who sold watercress to the people of the nearby villages caught herself afire by the bridge … And was burnt to death' and that 'on the anniversary of her sad and shocking end it was said that her ghost appeared wrapped in flames and screaming for help!' (Sanders 2021, 151). Sanders does not make any reference to the identity of this woman, but the *Faversham News* reported on 19 August 1911 that 'a shocking fatality occurred between Smarden and Pluckley … the unfortunate victim being an aged watercress seller, named Sarah Sharp, whose charred body was found by the roadside and whose clothing … had been accidentally ignited, probably from a smouldering tobacco pipe' ('Woman Burnt

to Death' 1911, 3). This report is corroborated by Sharp's death certificate (see Archival Sources).

The second story is that of the 'Hanging Schoolmaster'. Sanders explains that shortly before his family's return to Pluckley a decaying body was found hanging in a stand of bay laurel trees on the path to Mill Hill, also known to Sanders as 'Dicky Buss' Lane'. He writes, again in his memoir, that, 'to these great and gloomy evergreens a terrible happening clung', explaining that

> they became known, in the year 1919, as the 'Haunted Laurels', on account of a schoolmaster of [nearby village] Smarden having committed suicide by hanging himself in that darksome grove. He was missing for several weeks until one evening, old Richard Buss, happened to go through the Laurels and was 'kicked' in the face by the suspended thing that had once been a man. (Sanders 2021, 6)

Sanders records that Henry Turff claimed to have known the man who died in Pluckley in 1919, describing him as a schoolmaster who often walked the three miles from Smarden to drink and 'discourse upon logic' with him at the Black Horse Inn in Pluckley (Sanders 2021, 7).

There was a suicide at the same time and under the same circumstances described by Sanders, except that the man who died was neither from Smarden nor was he a schoolteacher. His name was Henry Edgar Martin, and he was a local papermaker. Martin's death certificate confirms that he had taken his own life in early August in the same place, at the same time, and under the same circumstances as those described by Sanders in *Pluckley Was My Playground*, having died by 'strangulation by hanging by a halter from a tree' (see Archival Sources). The same certificate also lists his death not as occurring while 'of unsound mind', but rather as an act of 'felo de se'—literally 'self-murder'. This legal term was used to describe suicides deemed to be carried out while the deceased was of sound mind.[6]

Martin was born around 1871, probably in Shoreham, Kent. He had moved around the county working in paper mills and by 1911 he was living in nearby Maidstone. When his body was discovered on Mill Hill on 15 August 1919, he and his wife had been living at a cottage on Jennings Farm, just north of Pluckley. He was employed at Ford Paper Mill in nearby Little Chart as a coucher, a position working in collaboration with a vatman and a layer to produce individual sheets of paper from a vat of suspended cellulose fibres.

The confusion around Martin's occupation stemmed from Sanders's conflation in *Pluckley Was My Playground* of the circumstances of Martin's death with those of another, later, suicide. An article in the *Kent Messenger & Gravesend Telegraph* on Saturday 1 September 1923 reported that a Smarden schoolmaster—the similarly named Harry Martin—had taken his own life because he was depressed 'due to the thought of leaving his many friends to go to a rest home in London' ('Schoolmaster's Suicide at Smarden' 1923, 11). According to Martin's death certificate, he drowned himself in a pond in Smarden 'whilst of unsound mind' (see Archival Sources). It appears that Turff had been speaking about Harry Martin—not Henry Edgar Martin—and that Sanders had amalgamated the two stories into one during the composition of his memoir.

The third story based on documented events and which makes its first appearance in Sanders (1950b) is the 'Screaming Man of the old Clay-Pit'. While Sanders provides

no details, the most common variant of the story was set out in Usborne's *All About Ghosts*, as relating to 'a worker … smothered to death when a wall of clay fell on him' at the Pluckley Brick and Tile Works at the southern edge of the village, and that 'his ghost … screams the same way as he did when he died' (Maynard 1977, 19). A corresponding incident occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. On 1 January 1899, Richard Bridgland, thirty-five years of age, was with two companions digging clay from a pit when a portion of the wall fell on him, in what a local newspaper described as 'the first accident to occur in the twenty-three years since the brickworks had been open' ('Killed by a Fall of Earth' 1899, 7). Bridgland was quickly dug out but was found to have broken his neck. His death was ruled an accident. He left behind a wife and five young children.

The final story with identifiable historical precedent is that of the 'Ghost of Rose Court', a spectral woman alleged to haunt a large house just north of the Brick and Tile Works. This was also first recorded in Sanders (1950b). Later retellings explain that the woman lived and died in Tudor times, and frequently characterize her as the mistress of a member of the Dering family who later took her own life with poison (Chambers 1984). In some stories, the poison was from ivy berries (Green 1973, 151), but often it is undefined. The haunting is said to take auditory form in the sound of her calling for her dogs (Underwood 1971, 205), or visual, with her being seen among the gardens at mid-afternoon, the time she was supposed to have died (Chambers 1984, 10).

There was a suicide at Rose Court, or Rose Cottage[7] as it was known at the time, albeit much later than the Tudor period. Mary Ann Bennett died at the property on 8 August 1862, after taking an overdose of opium. Her father, George Ellerton High, appeared at the inquest into her death, testifying that

> the deceased was … aged 31 years. She has suffered from disease of the brain for two years past. I have been staying with her and her husband for six weeks, during which time she has been in a state of mental derangement. Yesterday morning, a little before four o'clock, she came into my bedroom, and took from a drawer … a bottle containing a small quantity of opium. After that she continued in a sleepy state until about twenty minutes before three in the afternoon, when she died. ('Inquest at Pluckley' 1862, n.p.)

The ruling of the inquest was that she had died after 'poisoning herself while in a state of mental derangement' ('Inquest at Pluckley' 1862, n.p.) This report is corroborated by her death certificate (see Archival Sources).

The Proliferation of Pluckley's Ghosts, 1955–79

Sanders's stories found a receptive local audience in the period after the release of his memoir, reflected in press appearances across the later 1950s. Whether this was evidence of local familiarity with the tales or not is unclear, but he subsequently led at least two ghost-hunts, the first of which was in 1959 with members of a local ghost club ('Pluckley Ghost is "Now at Rest"' 1959) and the second in February 1960 in Smarden Wood, a recording of which was made to feature on BBC Radio 4's *Town and Country* programme later that same month ('They "Challenged the Devil by Candlelight"' 1960).

This local interest soon turned national with the *Kentish Express* on 19 January 1962, reporting that

> cameramen from the B.B.C. television studios were in [Pluckley] last week-end filming sequences for a 'Tonight' article—which was screened later in the week—on the Pluckley ghosts. Last year the village was featured in a radio programme, and I.T.V. cameramen have already visited the village once this year. ('Pluckley' 1962, 9)

Desmond Carrington's article followed in the *TV Times Christmas Extra* (Carrington 1962), a seasonal edition of the magazine compiling articles, television-themed games, and other ephemera. The article fits the description given by Carrington to Julia Stuart (although no mention is made here of Bill Evans) and is a wry narrative about a walk around Pluckley in which Carrington recounts eleven ghost stories. Despite his later assertions, these are largely retellings of those already reported by Sanders: the Red and White Ladies, the Hanging Schoolmaster, the Lady of Rose Court, the Screaming Man, the Miller, the Watercress Woman, and the Highwayman. Carrington adds only three stories here: the ghosts of a phantom coach and horses heard in local lanes, a monk at a property called Greystones whom Carrington associated with the Lady of Rose Court, and a poltergeist at Surrenden Dering. We can be fairly sure, given his later confession, that his three additions were fabrications of his own. What is unclear, however, is whether any of the narrative detail he provides for Sanders's stories was also newly fabricated, and how much was based on stories already present in the oral tradition within the community.

Carrington's piece was followed by Jack Hallam's *The Ghost Tour* (1967), which in addition to Sanders's stories included the phantom stagecoach and the poltergeist at Surrenden Dering Manor, both almost certainly derived from Carrington. Peter Underwood's *Gazetteer of British Ghosts* followed suit, featuring both Sanders's and Hallam's stories, with two additions—a poltergeist at the Black Horse Inn, and a woman in contemporary dress in St Nicholas's Churchyard (Underwood 1971).

The village community also reacted to the growing popularity of these stories. The 1971 Pluckley Fair, held on Saturday 14 August, was advertised as featuring 'Wrestling, Clay Pigeon Shoot, and Ghosts',[8] the latter provided in the form of the premier of a film called *Some Pluckley Ghosts* made by amateur dramatics society The Pluckley Players under the direction of a local man named Basil Cowles ('All Set for Village Fun Day' 1971). An article in the *Sunday Mirror* by journalist Colin Wills reported that the Players had made the film to raise money for repairs to the village hall and that it centred around the 'Devil's Bush'. The film seems to have been a light-hearted affair, with Wills reporting that during filming, 'a lorry was passing as an actor popped out of the bush in a cloud of smoke, and the driver nearly went through the windscreen as he jammed on his brakes' (Wills 1975, 23). Shot on 8-mm cinefilm, *Some Pluckley Ghosts* was apparently 'so widely shown that the print was worn out'.[9] One screening in July 1972 as part of a festival called 'Midsummer Madness' held in Staplehurst, Kent, was, however, slightly less popular: 'regrettably', the newspaper article notes, 'there was not a large attendance' (B. B. 1972, 18).

The poltergeist account at the Black Horse Inn mentioned by Underwood featured in the *Kentish Express* in January 1973 when then-landlady Peggy Whiting described

items going missing and later reappearing elsewhere, and a vase flying across the saloon bar. The article links the haunting to the murder of a woman by a bowling pin 'more than 100 years ago' ('The Ghost that Prefers Black' 1973, 16). Sanders wrote to the paper the same month to name the murdered woman as Miss Jean Spicer, whom he stated died on 20 May 1772 (Sanders 1973). The deceased was in fact a man named Jesse Spicer, and he was the victim of an accident, not foul play. The *Kentish Gazette* explained at the time that 'a melancholy accident happened in the nine-pin-yard at the Black-horse at Pluckley, where two men were going to the bowl for a wager, when one of them had the misfortune to hit a bye-stander [*sic*] (one Mr. Spicer) a violent blow on the head' ('Canterbury' 1772, n.p.). Spicer died at home later that evening and according to parish burial records was buried six days later (see Archival Sources).

Another ghost-hunt, this time organized by a London-based group, was held on 17 March 1973, with participants travelling from Charing Cross to Pluckley for an afternoon tour of twelve haunts: the ten described by Sanders, as well as the newer additions of the Phantom Stagecoach and ghostly Monk. A few months later, Ashford Hospital's Broadcasting Service produced an hour-long documentary about the village which included field recordings of a ghost-hunt held by the producers on a Friday night in July in St Nicholas's Churchyard.

Our Haunted Kingdom (Green 1973) was published in the same month and was the next book to provide an account of Pluckley's ghosts. Green added the story of a poltergeist at a property called Elvey Farm to the village's roster and is the second author—after Carrington—to record the story of the Monk at Greystones. The Elvey Farm poltergeist story came directly to Green from a resident at the property. Alan Ambrose described objects moving of their own free will and stated that his wife had seen an apparition of a Victorian man lying on a bed. Green links the haunting to a suicide at the property in which 'a tenant farmer shot himself in the old dairy in the 1850s due to an overpowering feeling of depression at losing his wife and failure in his business' (Green 1973, 150). Green notes that Ambrose did not believe there was a link between this event and his own experiences, but two of the property's later owners—who turned the farm into a hotel in 2007—were interviewed for the BBC Radio 4 series *Open Country* and linked their paranormal experiences at the property to the suicide of a farmer named Edward John Brett.[10] Brett took his own life at Elvey Farm on 10 January 1900. He was twenty-nine years of age, and according to his death certificate, died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound sustained 'during temporary insanity' (see Archival Sources). Whether or not Green was referring to this suicide or another one at the same property is not clear; although a man named John Skier did hang himself in a hay barn in Pluckley on 17 April 1856 ('Pluckley' 1856), where in the village he died does not appear to have been recorded.

Hippisley Coxe's *Haunted Britain* followed in the latter half of 1973, containing the same stories as Green, but without his additions of the poltergeists at Elvey Farm and Black Horse Inn (Hippisley Coxe 1973, 74–75). A paperback edition of Green's book followed in 1974, and Marc Alexander's *Phantom Britain* was published in 1975. Alexander added no new ghosts, and although the book did not mention the Elvey Farm haunting, it otherwise reproduced the earlier stories (Alexander 1975, 112).

In January 1977 an article in the national tabloid newspaper *Sunday People* suggested that ghosts were responsible for a spate of relationship break-ups in the village—including the end of Black Horse landlady Peggy Whiting's marriage (Thorne 1977). Later that same year came the publication of Eric Maple's *Supernatural England* and Usborne's *All About Ghosts*. The latter featured a two-page spread on 'the village with a dozen ghosts' comprising a map of Pluckley marked with descriptions of the village's phantoms and photographs of their haunts (Maynard 1977, 18–19).

By the beginning of the 1980s, there were at least seventeen ghost stories connected to the village (Chambers 1984), the Black Horse was advertising itself as being 'famous for its help yourself cold buffets, open log fires, and ghosts',[11] and national press attention had established the reputation of the village as a destination for curious publics and dedicated ghost-hunters alike.

Narrative Qualities: Contradictory Accounts and Slippery Histories

As noted earlier, Sanders was prone to errors in his factual reporting of local events, the most significant relating to the occupation of Henry Edgar Martin, the so-called 'Hanging Schoolmaster', a mistake that has been reproduced in every subsequent account. However, as significant as his mistakes is Sanders's tendency towards self-contradiction in his storytelling. This is demonstrable in his writing about Pluckley's ghosts, where contradictions would appear between one piece of writing and another. For instance, his debunking of the story of the miller's ghost in his 1948 letter to the *Kentish Express* (Sanders 1948), subsequent resurrection of the story in his 1950 article (Sanders 1950b) as an established local legend, and ambivalence about the legend in his memoir (Sanders 2021) seem to simultaneously play out the roles of sceptic, believer, and agnostic. In other instances, Sanders attaches ghosts to locations in one text, before overlooking them in another; Sanders (1950b), for example, describes ghosts at Rose Court and the Brick and Tile Works, spectres which do not feature in his later memoir despite writing about those same locations, sometimes at length (Sanders 2021, 124, 149, 174, and 200). Further, Sanders (1950b) also connects the Highwayman legend to a ghost, a link which is not made in *Pluckley Was My Playground* (Sanders 2021, 144–45).

This underlying fluidity in Sanders's storytelling likely reflected an internal dialogue between his curiosity about the subject matter and an evolving personal belief system relating to the paranormal which grew more complicated over time. At first, Sanders seems subscribed to a scientifically inclined approach to ghost-hunting; both *Haunted Kent* (Sanders 1946), which sought to unpick and explain any anomalous experience in great detail, and his 1948 letter, which offered plausible rational explanations for an implied local legend (Sanders 1948), were suggestive of a broadly rationalist approach to his work. Within a short space of time, however, his correspondence with the local press began to suggest a growing inclination towards a belief system informed by the spiritualist movement. This was evidenced particularly in his activities of the late 1950s, such as his ghost-hunt in which he claimed the Red Lady's spirit had been 'released' via a brief possession of a member of his party ('Pluckley Ghost is "Now at Rest"' 1959), or

his 1960 ghost-hunt in Dering Woods which left him with a feeling of unease that he described as exhibiting 'a persistency I had never, in over 21 years of psychical research, encountered before' ('They "Challenged the Devil by Candlelight"' 1960, 2).

This tension within Sanders between the scientific and the spiritual traditions of ghost-hunting may offer some explanation as to the internal contradictions found in his narratives, reflecting Cowdell's (2006) suggestion that stories such as those recorded by Sanders become containers of both historical narratives and personal belief systems, which readily collapse doubt and disbelief into credulity; the stories are true in the sense that they are told as such, and become hard to denounce as otherwise, despite apparent inconsistencies. This is notably true of the 'Hanging Schoolmaster', where an absence of counternarratives that seek to correct the error—that is, there is no record of a 'Hanging Papermaker' ever having been a local legend—suggests that the only person to have thought there was a ghost haunting the laurels was Sanders himself; in other words, Sanders believed their *ought* to be a ghost attached to the story, on account of the tragic circumstances of Martin's death.

This narrative slipperiness, or tendency for wishful invention, arguably set a precedent for the reinterpretation, augmentation, or outright reinvention of ghost stories attached to the village by subsequent authors and researchers. This was most notable in Carrington (1962), where Sanders's narratives were rewritten in the company of admitted fabrications, but also in later bifurcations and adaptions of the stories, many of which can be traced to the pages of the 'ghost gazetteers'. This is in spite of that fact that many of the authors encountered Sanders's work first-hand. For example, Underwood (1971, 204) refers to the story of the Red Lady as being 'for a long time closely guarded', a description taken nearly verbatim from Sanders (1946, 30); in *All About Ghosts* (Maynard 1977, 18), the detail of the schoolmaster found hanging from a laurel tree is taken directly from Sanders (2021, 6) and the encounters with lights and noises of the Red Lady from Sanders (1946).[12] Nonetheless, there were clearly cases where this familiarity was not present. Hallam, for example, misattributes the story of the lead-lined coffin to the 'White Lady' of Surrenden Dering (Hallam 1967, 41). Underwood (1971) adds a second ghost at St Nicholas's churchyard, to whom he attributes characteristics given by Sanders to the Red Lady, and further muddles the latter's details with that of the White Lady (Underwood 1971, 204–205). *Our Haunted Kingdom* (Green 1973, 152) included a sighting in 1965 of the Hanging Schoolmaster, describing an apparition wearing a frock coat and striped trousers, and shifted the tragedy a good century before the event Sanders described occurred. The error in the date of the underpinning event is repeated by Alexander in *Phantom Britain* (1975, 112). Green's version is retold again by G. Weaver in *Kent Ghosts* (1977, 25–26). Curiously, Maple's accounts in *Supernatural England* (1977, 154) are equally blurry, with the Watercress Woman, for instance, dying in a fire at Pluckley Mill, despite Maple explicitly referencing Underwood's Sanders-quoting *Gazetteer* in his bibliography (Maple 1977, 201).

In spite of these variations, the core components of the Pluckley's ghost stories themselves rarely change and they remain folklorically somewhat unremarkable. The older stories tend towards archetypes—a highwayman as guardian of a specific location (Davidson 1974), or the ghost of a beautiful 'woman in white' (Beck 1970), for example.

Minor elements of some stories run counter to established folkloric trends, but not significantly. For instance, folklore associated with suicides often situates ghosts at crossroads, as they were the traditional burial place for people who took their own lives (Puhvel 1976; Halliday 2010). However, in the case of Pluckley, thanks to the Burial of Suicide Act 1823 and the Interments (felo de se) Act of 1882, changes in legislation meant that Mary Ann Bennett, Henry Edgar Martin, and John Brett were all interred in St Nicholas's graveyard, with their alleged hauntings corresponding instead with their place of death.

The evolution of Pluckley's ghost stories nonetheless serves to reveal shifts in societal attitudes towards class, gender, and public morals, confirming Holloway and Kneale's (2008) assertion that ghost stories operate as a form bound into the cultural and social contexts that frame them. In the case of Mary Ann Bennett, for example, the later retelling of her narrative promoted by Carrington (1962) constructs her as a participant in an apocryphal love triangle, with her death being remembered only in the context of romantic failure (see also Chambers 1984, 10), obscuring her own life story and the challenges she will have faced. Similarly, when the story of the Red Lady evolved during the 1940s to suggest she was searching for the grave of a lost child (Chambers 1984), it was a move that not only reflected an observation (Davies 2007, 51) that graveyard ghosts often require more reason to haunt their resting places than simply having been laid to rest there, but that also spoke to social tropes around women's experience of child loss. Finally, the development of Sarah Sharp's story, which evolved to include accusations that Sharp was a gin-drinker, and that spilled alcohol acted an accelerant for the flames that killed her (Chambers 1984, 12), suggests a moral judgement—that she was in some way responsible for her own death. Given Sharp's itinerant working life, low socio-economic status, and gender, this development likely reflects prejudices against women who did not conform to traditional roles (Thomas 2007). This was further compounded in her evolution in Underwood (1971) from 'Watercress Woman' to 'Gypsy Woman'; Gypsy and Traveller communities were frequently subject to 'othering' in popular culture, which simultaneously constructed them as mysterious, dangerous, or hedonistic outsiders, and as exemplars of a lost pastoral way of life (Nord 2006).[13]

Witnesses, Sources, and Other Local Storytellers

While Sanders was the propagator, investigator, and initial disseminator of many of these stories, he was not necessarily their originator; he credits his grandfather Jesse Pile and his teacher Henry Turff as two sources, but it is plausible that there were others, too. This suggests that at least some of the stories Sanders wrote down may have existed in the village before his research began. This can be inferred from Sanders (1948) in which he debunks the miller's ghost, a move which suggested that there was already some local interest in the location as a haunted site. Knowledge of the local ghost stories was not necessarily widespread, however. For instance, in his letter to the *Kentish Express* about Winan's interaction with the 'White Lady' of

Surrenden Dering, Mark Tiffen is at pains to point out he does 'not recall the "Lady of the Churchyard"' (Tiffen 1959, 21) as a local story.

Sanders also never claimed to have seen any of Pluckley's ghosts himself, going as far as to debunk his own observations of lights and noises at St Nicholas's Church in a later chapter of *Haunted Kent*, explaining that the light in the belfry was likely a motorcar's reflected headlights, the voice heard in the cemetery was an auditory hallucination experienced by his tired and nervous companion, and the aural phenomenon inside the church was related to his own presence, including a misinterpretation of his own breathing (Sanders 1946, 133–36 and 167–71). The only witness Sanders named as having *seen* a ghost—as opposed to being the source of a story *about* a ghost—was Walter Winans, a known showman and self-promoter with a pre-existing interest in the paranormal. Winans had written, for example, to *Occult Review*, 'a monthly magazine to devoted to the investigation of super normal phenomena and the study of psychological problems' edited by Ralph Shirley (Shirley 1914, 127), in 1914. 'Can any of your readers explain the following, which, I find, on comparing notes with other shooting men, occurs to them as well as myself', asks Winans

> [that] at times, only for a few minutes, when shooting in competitions there comes a period when one cannot miss. The sensation is as if some invisible power had control of one's shooting; it feels as if something had hold of the muzzle of my rifle and held it firmly against the bull's-eye. (Winans 1914, 174)

Sanders also alleges that Winans believed that dinosaurs might still be living in the 'African Congo' (Sanders 2021, 177).

Despite the apparent shortage of witnesses, local knowledge of the stories told by Sanders and Carrington was established enough to provide residents of the village with the material necessary to continue telling the stories themselves. Clark (1992), for example, names a local man, Stan Pile, as a rumoured source whom locals witnessed telling stories to visiting journalists in exchange for free beer. Pile, who died in 1991, was a cousin to Alice Emily Pile, Sanders's mother, and his own mother shared a maiden name with Sarah Sharp, the Watercress Woman. Whatever Pile's motivations—a local business owner told me that they remembered Pile's storytelling during the 1970s and 1980s as being an act of mischief—it seems plausible he was, like Sanders, someone with an interest in local history and folklore. Yet another example of locals reporting sightings comes from Green (1973, 151), who describes an encounter with the phantom coach and horses experienced by the son of 'Air Commander Sutcliffe'—despite the strong likelihood that the underlying narrative was fabricated by Carrington. Similarly, the emergence of a Tudor time-frame and love-triangle narrative for Mary Ann Bennet's story first appeared in Carrington, and while it is impossible to know whether that was another of Carrington's fabrications, or whether the details had come from other local sources, it became the dominant variant of the story by the end of the 1970s. These examples remind us that a great deal of the evolution of Pluckley's stories was almost certainly occurring in the oral tradition, but they remained, at least into the 1980s, restricted to the overarching

narrative frameworks and characters established by Sanders and later Carrington in the period 1939–62.

Pluckley and Contemporary Cultures of Ghost-Hunting

The celebration of sites like Pluckley as 'haunted villages' has marked a shift away from a tradition of communities wishing to rid themselves of ghosts, towards a desire instead to commemorate them and their histories (Davies 2007). The roles such stories play in broader society are complex and multifaceted, with a mixture of sincere belief, agnosticism, scepticism, and curiosity shaping the conditions through which such stories are shared and received (Cowdell 2011).

These stories are commonly encountered now via a consumption of cultural narratives and locations, and specific performances and practices, such as 'ghost tours', where guides take participants on tours of urban or rural spaces reputed to be haunted (Holloway 2010). Michele Hanks (2011) outlines the way in which these practices provide a means for participants to engage with questions of history, religion, science, and secularism. The assemblage of the scientific and the supernatural is also popularly performed in televised ghost-hunts, which blur the lines between 'authentic' activity and staged entertainment (Lauro and Paul 2013) and notable dramas such as BBC's controversial *Ghostwatch* (1992), which adopted the format of a live-broadcast ghost-hunt that goes terribly wrong. This tradition is continued across cinema, literature, and new media forms on YouTube and other social platforms.

Contemporary engagement with ghost stories, in their many guises in different media, has been argued to represent a form of re-enchantment, connecting modern and often secular societies with other forms of knowledge, history, or affective experience (Weston et al. 2019; Holloway and Kneale 2008). Julian Holloway (2010) also argues that the affective assemblages of infrastructures, dispositions, instances of play, and performance are central to the maintenance of both our engagement with and the survival of ghost stories themselves. Activities such as ghost-hunting, storytelling, ghost tours, or self-guided exploration of haunted spaces are part of the assemblage at the intersection of the supernatural, historical, esoteric, embodied, and imagined; all of these processes were central to the establishment of Pluckley's ghost folklore from 1939 onwards, beginning with Sanders's own ghost-hunts.

The power of these stories to attract attention, however, has not been without its challenges. Pluckley's residents continue to navigate the legacy of this haunted reputation even now. When the *Open Country* team from BBC Radio 4 visited Pluckley in 2010, it found local opinion divided on the matter of its ghosts; while some residents felt the village's renown was harmless, others felt it drew unwanted attention. This was particularly true at Halloween-time in the early 1990s, when rowdy thrill-seekers and ghost-hunters descended upon the village, trespassing and causing damage to local property (Durrant 2000). As such, we should also consider the way in which flows and counterflows of ghostlore-making affect communities that hold the stories.

Finally, contra Westwood's and Simpson's (2006, 136) admittedly tongue-in-cheek implication that by lacking narrative richness, haunted villages may be of less folkloric significance, the example of Pluckley shows that narrative rigour is not necessarily a pre-requisite for important cultural processes to unfold. Pluckley remains popular perhaps because of the mutability of its legends, which have proliferated in retellings ever since Sanders's first published works: in books on the paranormal and in newspaper articles on travel and real estate, while local interest and ghost-hunts have also continued. Ten of Sanders's ghosts still appear on the village website today[14] and popular interest in the hauntings continues in local news media[15] and across websites, online message-boards, videos, television and radio programmes, and podcasts. These all contribute to a process of contemporary placemaking which has ghost folklore at its heart (Gentry 2007).

Conclusion

Frederick Sanders's work documenting his early life experiences and local traditions and histories, combined with his interest in the paranormal and ghost-hunting, provides the bedrock for Pluckley's reputation as 'the most haunted village in England'. The older stories gathered by Sanders, which came frequently from family or community members, lack biographical detail but represent folk motifs common in other similar legends. Those recorded by Sanders that deal with contemporary events in the village are conversely richer in biographical detail but harder to find corroborating sources for. This fact, combined with Sanders's own inconsistency as a storyteller, has generated fertile ground from which the tales could enter the public record and evolve over time. Much of this local interest was played out in the local, and later national, press and media, at a time that coincided with a rising interest in haunted landscapes and places promoted in a range of books across the late 1960s and 1970s. This provided the conditions for a rich contemporary ghost folklore to appear over the last eighty years, which is traceable almost as it happened. How those stories proliferated through the 1980s and into the internet age is a task that remains to be done and would be no mean feat to complete.

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Notes

[1] The website Higgypop points out that the village was never accorded an actual World Record but, rather, that the village was featured as a curio for its interesting but fundamentally unverifiable claim ('Is Pluckley Still The Most Haunted Village In England?', 18 August 2020, https://www.higgypop.com/news/is-pluckley-still-the-most-haunted-village-in-england/).

[2] Buss (1845–1933) was the miller at Pluckley during Sanders's time, succeeding his father, Charles Buss (1806–86).

[3] See 'Freak Storm', *Kentish Express,* 29 April 1939, for local reporting on the event. Film footage of the aftermath, taken by an amateur filmmaker in 1939, can be watched for free online on the BFI Player: https://bit.ly/35Imfqg.

[4] Although Sanders refers to these as Smarden Woods, as it appears to be a local name (Sanders 1950b, 5), maps describe the area as Dering Wood.

[5] Frances Pile (née Ifield) (1857–1940).

[6] Despite changing attitudes towards suicide in the preceding years, 'felo de se' was still considered a crime, and although the Interments (felo de se) Act of 1882 allowed Martin to be buried in the local church—as evidenced in a marginal note in the Parish burial records (see Archival Sources)—his widow would still likely have faced financial penalties including the potential forfeiture of property or the invalidation of insurance (Solano et al. 2018). Something of this kind seems to have happened as, by 1921, his widow Kate Martin was living with her sister and brother-in-law in Maidstone, again working at the nearby Springfield Paper Mill where she was still employed until at least 1939, at which point she was seventy years of age.

[7] Green (1973) attributes this haunting to 'Rose Farm', which he says is close to St Nicholas's Church. There is a property called Rose Farm in the village, but it is a mile or so to the south-west. Rose Court, however, is less than half a mile from the church.

[8] Advertisement for 'Pluckley Fair Saturday', *Kentish Express,* 6 August 1971, 17.

[9] Pluckley Appraisal Committee, *Pluckley Village Appraisal for the Millennium*, 1999 (pdf available at https://bit.ly/3b4mlLh, last accessed 21 October 2024).

[10] 'Pluckley: The Most Haunted Village in Britain', *Open Country*, BBC Radio 4, aired 4 November 2010.

[11] Advertisement in *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*, 19 January 1979, 26. Notably, later that same year an advertisement for the same pub fails to mention ghosts but does stress that the establishment is now under new management (advertisement, *Maidstone Telegraph*, 9 November 1979, VIII).

[12] Bob Fischer (2019) notes in his celebration of the book in *Fortean Times* magazine that its author Chris Maynard also engaged the services of Eric Maple as a researcher, and that the team spent much time in libraries and exploring newspaper clippings in local archives. This makes it likely that they would have come across Sanders's work.

[13] Sharp's story also fails to record how a farmhand named John Maxted passed Sarah Sharp during her accident but did not stop to help, only returning later when he heard her screams. He was censured at the inquest into her death for showing 'great thoughtlessness in not going to the aid of the deceased woman when he first saw her' ('Woman Burnt to Death' 1911, 3).

[14] Pluckley Parish Council, 'Ghosts', *Pluckley*, https://pluckley.net/village-life/history/ghosts/. Last accessed 21 October 2024.

[15] See Rhys Griffiths, 'We braved a walk in the "screaming woods" of Pluckley—Kent's most-haunted village', *Kent Online*, 29 October 2023, https://www.kentonline.co.uk/ashford/news/we-braved-a-walk-in-the-screaming-woods-of-kents-most-hau-295890/; and Jane Lavender, 'Pluckley: The 15 horrifying ghosts and chilling nightly screams in Kent's most haunted village', *Kent Live*, 9 May 2020, https://www.kentlive.news/whats-on/whats-on-news/pluckley-15-horrifying-ghosts-chilling-4119761.

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