

Royal Navy Gives Credence To Psychics

Even at the best of times, but especially in the middle of a war of reason against unreason, public institutions such as the Royal Navy ought to set an example to the public and to their employees, and also be held to a high standard of accountability in how they use their valuable time and resources.

Therefore they should not call in "**psychics, mediums and paranormal scientists**" to investigate why naval ratings don't like one of their buildings:

Top brass at Plymouth's naval dockyard have called in ghost-busting experts - to see if the base is haunted.

A team of paranormal investigators will arrive at Devonport Dockyard on Friday armed with night-vision cameras, **dowsing rods** and sound equipment.

The research will focus on the Hangman's Cell where naval ratings have been spooked by a strange "atmosphere".

Something stinks there, and it isn't ghosts.

Tue, 06/22/2004 - 19:21 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

I smell no stink

This is a spooky historic building, with a visitor centre. Presumably a section of the naval employees there are actually performing duties to do with tourist revenue rather than doing anything military. The paranormal research drummed up plenty of media attention from dozens of TV stations and newspapers around the world, and it emphasises the spooky appeal of the dockyard, with its working gallows and ghost legends, so it must have gained Devonport Dockyard lots of extra visitors and cash.

I don't understand what exactly makes this irresponsible. People who make money from the belief in the supernatural range from mystics who will take you under their wing and relieve you of all your material possessions to the authors of ghost stories who exploit the merest twinge of metaphysical doubt to give you a bit of a thrill. Many of the people along this range must be entirely

innocent of doing any harm. Perhaps all of them are. People who believe in the paranormal presumably benefit from exploring that belief. Besides, there is a guilty pleasure - which ought not really be guilty - for some of the most sensible people in a pretense of belief in the supernatural. Examples are prayer, pretending to talk with dead loved ones (the very rational Richard Feynman admitted to this), and talking to pets (**Churchill**). I'm sure we ought not feel guilty for casual flirtation with illogical beliefs, and I don't see how the navy is doing wrong by providing people with the opportunity.

If it was an encyclopedia offering unscientific information, or the navy attempting to develop psychic communication with submarines in a 1960s cold war stylee, I would be disgusted, but we don't rely on the navy's visitor centres for accurate information about the status in reality of ghosts, whereas we do expect them to be entertaining, so the Devonport people have done the right thing.

Pseudoscientists deserve to be constantly debunked, but they are amusing, and are not a credible threat to science, are they?

by a reader on Thu, 06/24/2004 - 17:02 | [reply](#)

Churchill's Parrot myth

This isn't relevant to the argument here either way, but it appears that the Churchill parrot story is a **myth**.

by **David Deutsch** on Thu, 06/24/2004 - 17:34 | [reply](#)

what exactly makes this irresponsible

Why is this irresponsible? One reason (of several) is that the "psychics, mediums and paranormal scientists" will now be able to say in their advertising that they have worked for the Royal Navy. This will, as the title of the World piece says, give credence to their claims.

by **David Deutsch** on Fri, 06/25/2004 - 19:17 | [reply](#)

an idiotarian responds to randi-an spam

hi. new here. found this site in my bookmarks, wasn't sure why, checking it out. you link to tcs, which is a good thing. i'm not sure quite how you use the term idiotarian. but i'm from the lunatic fringe of the libertarian movement, call myself an idiot-savant, and will discuss your claims from that perspective.

The randi link reminded me of nigerian spam. "i have \$1 million in negotiable bonds in a european bank, and i need your help getting it out. all you have to do is..." There are no objective criteria to claim the prize, no independent auditor, no formal set of rules applicable to everyone. key terms like occult are left undefined. so if, say, a guy can turn water into wine, and lead into gold, and find water, and diagnose problems with sick buildings, this wouldn't count, if the means were not occult by some moveable definition.

the X prize, as a counterexample, has specific disclosed objective

criteria about building and flying a private spacecraft.
back to the naval college. [aside: is that the one at dartmouth? to americans, dartmouth is a college in new hampshire with an arbitrary name, to brits, it's the mouth of the river dart.]
One day, a group of wise men appear, dressed in flowing robes, carrying dowsing rods and such like. We'll call them hercule, sherlock, lord peter, lassie, and fung sueh-tsu.
They sniff, collect samples, walk around, set up equipment to measure auras and orgone flow and such, test dowsing rods, talk to residents, and say they will return when the moon is full to make their report. They speak amongst themselves, muttering occult-sounding spells. 'Aspergillus flavus?' 'serpula lachrymans. phoma.' 'grandfaloons?' 'no, not foma, phoma.'
On the day when the moon is full, they return, and suggest the following. Compact flourescent lighting. A fan to blow outside air from west to east. A radio playing classical music at low volume. And they bring a nightingale in a silver cage, with instructions for its care, but warn that if the bird dies, it should be sent to them at once. "Do these things, and the curse is lifted."
And so it was.
ok, silly story, but my point is that just because somebody calls themself a dowser or an efficiency consultant or a psychic doesn't establish whether or not they are able to solve problems at hand. Lord Peter is a wine expert; he has a sensitive nose which would detect and assess data you or i would miss. doubly true for lassie. some dowsers can smell water, or smell the conditions in which water is found. they may not consciously be aware of what they know and how they know it, but they can locate sites for wells. others can sense the presence of molds and germs which create health problems.
songbirds make inexpensive environmental monitoring systems.
etc.

by a reader on Sun, 06/27/2004 - 16:30 | [reply](#)

Randi

I think that the above has an unfair characterization of the Randi Challenge.

It's not that the criteria are subjective. It's just that the test procedures are determined in conjunction with the claimant and tailored to his specific claims. What's wrong with that?

It seems to me that describing the exact test conditions in advance for all conceivable paranormal claims is impractical as well as unfair; as it might provide a good magician with enough information to figure out how to defeat inadequate test conditions.

I don't think that the question of whether or not the claim is paranormal or not is likely to be controversial or unfairly defined. If the reader has some conflicting actual knowledge about this, I'd be very interested to hear about it.

Gil

by Gil on Mon, 06/28/2004 - 17:19 | [reply](#)

Plymouth Naval Base

Interesting comments, thank you. However, the Naval project was my own private project and still is, we all reasons for doing things and mine is learning, I hope the amount of money, time and effort I have spent in my studies and research will provide the navy with something concrete, as the organiser of the project I refrained from giving interviews after the investigation, if you can find me a tabloid where I did, I may chase another ghost for you! When you lose someone you love to wherever they may go, isnt it worth knowing more? millions of people who have seen ghosts, including me can't be mad! you never really know someone not here or on the other side so if someone wants to do something for a good cause .. who are you to stop them? and why dont you encourage them instead of discourage them? I never asked nor received any payment for the investigation, further more I have been asked for features for magazines and asked that any compensation be rewarded to the RSPCA, my favourite charity, we have free will, animals don't. We have a choice who we love, animals don't. As I said 'FREEWILL', whether Im criticised or not, I love the paranormal work, its my hobby, its my heart. So is the Naval base haunted? It's your choice to believe or disbelieve. God Bless

by a reader on Tue, 06/29/2004 - 21:47 | [reply](#)