



THAT HAUNTED LOOK: The historic Guildford Hotel, which burnt down last year, was the site of ghostly goings-on, according to medium Anthony Grzelka.

GHOST TOWN

Strange apparitions, things that go bump in the night – Scoop takes you to some of WA’s most haunted locations, and shines a torch on the spectres that lurk in the dark. **text** gabi woolgar « **images** aaron bunch

The woman stands, looking out across the land from the old bridge at Pinjarra. She has returned to the bridge, the scene of her death from an apoplectic fit, for the past seven years, and every year, as midnight strikes, has appeared to be trying to reach out and speak to the living from beyond the grave.

She has visited the house of her brother, knocking three times at his back door, speaking her brother’s name. The same brother has seen his sister’s ghost, walking across the bridge, always on the anniversary of her death.

This time, on the seventh anniversary, however, men are waiting for her, waiting to try to catch her. Kate appears one more time, again at midnight, “a tall stately figure of a female clad in a light loose dress similar to that she had on at the time she was found dead on the old Bridge”.

The men rush towards her but in an instant, Kate has vanished, her apparition a mere whisper on the wind, never to be seen again. The story of Kate on the Old Pinjarra Bridge, as retold in the journal of Thomas Scott, dated between 1870 to 1874, is one of the oldest ghost stories of Western Australia, but it is not the state’s only ghostly tale.

Professor Graham Seal, director of Curtin University’s Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific, has uncovered a rich seam of supernatural stories, mostly handed down through the oral tradition, during his research into the nation’s folklore and legends.

“A lot of the most enduring ghost stories are connected to pubs and hotels,” says Graham, “probably because they are usually the oldest buildings in the town. Many have haunting traditions associated with them, like the Kalamunda Hotel ghost and the White Lady of the Fitzgerald Hotel in Northbridge.”

As with many ghost stories in Europe, these apparitions are the result of some violent or traumatic incident. According to Graham’s research in the entertaining *The Haunted West* website, Paddy Connolly, the original owner and builder of the Kalamunda Hotel was “something of a ladies’ man”.

After making a local girl pregnant after an affair, the poor girl jumped from the hotel balcony, leaving her spirit forever haunting the hotel. Another version of the story sees the girl committing suicide in room 24, a room which guests are reluctant to linger in, reporting “glowing lights

in the room when it is unoccupied and the corridor outside is said to be always chilly, even on the warmest days”.

Paddy Connolly is also said to haunt the hotel, “walking on air” between the hotel’s two buildings, accompanied by his daughter who is said to have died in the hotel’s attic.

At Albany’s Gaol, Kit Rowley and his wife Bev conduct ghost tours, in full period costume.

“I dress up as the prison’s governor, John McGovern, while Bev is his wife, Mary Ann Mannix, who was the jail’s matron. It’s very atmospheric, taking the tours round the jail at night, with candles flickering,” says Kit

Ruined women, usually mourning the loss of a child, are a fairly regular motif of WA’s haunting, and Albany Gaol has a particularly tragic version of the story.

“The story goes that a 13-year-old Aboriginal girl became pregnant to her employer, who subsequently accused her of thieving. She was locked up in the jail, and had a stillborn child, and two months later, died. They say she cried herself to death – and people say they can hear heartbreaking crying around her cell. They say she won’t stop crying until she gets her baby back.”

Another theory for the mournful sound of the baby’s cries is that, as some of the governor’s nine children died while he was serving at the jail, including twin baby daughters, they could be their spirits remaining forever trapped and in anguish. At Rottnest Island too an unfortunate woman, a young housemaid at the island’s Lodge, discovered she was pregnant and returned to the mainland to tell the father.

When he refused to acknowledge the poor girl, the maid returns to the island where she takes her own life. People have since reported hearing the crying of a baby, and a “frightening and unhappy presence” in the part of the hotel where the body was found, according to *The Haunted West* notes.

It’s not surprising perhaps, that Albany Gaol, being one of the oldest prisons in WA, has more than its fair share of spooky goings-on, thanks to a collection of notorious inmates during its past. It was built in 1852 for convicts shipped from the UK as artisans and skilled labourers. Women were also held here, and it was used as a colonial prison and a police lockup in the 1930s.

“One of the most infamous prisoners who was held at Albany was Peter McKean, alias William McDonald, the only prisoner to be hanged at the jail in 1872,” says Kit. McKean was a “ticket of leave” convict – a system of rehabilitation for prisoners, which meant they could effectively serve a sentence and work for free settlers. With his friend Yorky Marriott, Peter was working on a farm at Slab Hut Gully when a disagreement between the pair led to Yorky being felled by an axe. When the corpse was found several days later, Peter was tried and convicted for the murder, despite his protestations that a “vicious horse” was to blame for Yorky’s death. Peter was hanged by a fellow convict on October 12 1872, acting as a make-do executioner in exchange for a 12-month reduction of his own sentence.

“The hanging was not quick, perhaps due to the inexperience of the executioner,” says Kit. “It took three minutes, 26 seconds, and he died of slow strangulation. And if that wasn’t gruesome enough, the local primary school children apparently witnessed the event.”

It wasn’t long before reports of strange noises and banging from Peter’s old cell were reported – and continue to this day, according to Kit.

Another notorious criminal, Frederick Bailey Deeming, staying at Albany Gaol for just a night, has added his own spectre to the prison’s rich supernatural history.

“He was a serial killer, responsible for the death of his wife and four children back in the UK, who killed another wife here in Australia, and was attempting to lure another woman to be his wife when he was caught. During his night here in Albany, he managed to shave off his moustache with a piece of broken glass in an attempt to alter his appearance before his trial in Melbourne, despite being checked on at hourly intervals by guards.”

It was all to no avail however – Deeming was convicted of the killings and hanged in Melbourne in 1892. Visitors say they can feel somebody touching them when they pass through the cell that Deeming was held in, albeit briefly.

Thanks to WA’s long coastline, many ghost stories have seafarers at their heart, including a chilling tale, again from Albany Gaol.

“More often than not,” says Kit, “it was Scandinavian sailors who were arrested and held at the jail for unruly behaviour or absconding from their ship when they were ashore. One tourist from Sweden visiting the jail knew that she was descended from an absconded seaman who had been held in a cell here in Albany.”

The tourist took pictures of the cell and other spots in the jail, but when she tried to download



CREEPY CHRONICLES: Professor Graham Seal has documented some of WA’s spookiest stories. **BELOW:** The Fremantle Arts Centre, the former Fremantle Asylum, was the site of an unsettling paranormal encounter for medium Anthony Grzelka.

the images from her camera in Albany, the computer crashed and on close inspection, she realised that all the photos appeared intact except the one of the cell where her ancestor was held. Back in Sweden she tried to download them again, her computer crashed again, and again all the images were present except the one of the seaman’s cell.

Prof Graham Seal has also researched ghost stories connected to the sea, uncovering a dramatic tale set in Broome.

“Abraham Davis was, among other things, a prominent entrepreneur in the Broome pearling industry around the turn of the century,” writes Graham. “An eminent man in the Jewish community of Broome, Davis was drowned along with all other passengers and crew in the wreck of the *Koombana*, off Port Hedland in 1912.



“I’d say at Fremantle Prison there are eight to 10 ‘real’ ghosts... rather than just what I call residual energies.”

“His fine house later became the palace of the first Anglican Bishop of the North West, Bishop Gerard Trower, and one night Trower awoke to see a ghostly figure standing in a pool of light, dressed as a rabbi.”

It has been suggested by Ion Idriess, author of *Forty Fathoms Deep*, that Abraham was carrying with him the allegedly priceless “Roseate Pearl” – and like most stories about priceless jewels, the pearl was a gem with a terrifying curse that all those who possessed it would endure ill-fortune.

Broome itself seems to be something of a focus for paranormal activity, according to Graham.

“There’s a beacon on the foreshore that unaccountably fades from time to time, and it is said that the ghosts of drowned pearlers creep around the beacon on certain nights, causing the light to falter.”

Despite Graham’s interest in the subject, he is quick to point out that there is “nothing paranormal” about his own beliefs.

“It interests me because it is part of my ongoing research into Australian folklore, and ghost stories are very much part of that tradition. On the other hand, when I’ve interviewed people, particularly those who have witnessed or think they have witnessed a phenomena, it’s clear they believe it to be true. Twenty years ago I spoke to people working at the Fitzgerald Hotel in Northbridge who all reported having similar experiences around the bar area – a ‘White Lady’, often smiling, sometimes dancing, moving objects around and exerting a presence in certain rooms.”

Anthony Grzelka knows all about such things, being one of the country’s most respected mediums. For the past four years, he has been conducting tours of another of WA’s ghost-strewn locations, Fremantle Prison.

Built by convicts in the 1850s, Fremantle has held some particularly dastardly felons over the years, as well as unfortunates shipped to Australia from the UK for relatively small misdemeanours.

“I do six to 10 tours a year, offering people the chance to see the prison through a medium’s eyes. There are a lot of energies still there, like a residual psychic fingerprint, still lingering long after the person has left.”

Anthony says he has been aware of his mediumship since the age of five, but it wasn’t until much later in life he realised his gift could be of help to others who were looking for reassurance in the afterlife. During the prison tours, however, some unwelcome attention from old detainees is perhaps not so reassuring.

“I took a tour group through the prison and reached a cell where I knew a convicted paedophile from Kalgoorlie had been held. One girl at the back suddenly ran out, claiming she could feel somebody standing next to her. Afterwards, we found out that this was the convict’s granddaughter, and that he had hung himself in that cell.”

Some ghosts, Anthony believes, are trapped in the location they manifest themselves in, whether they died there or not, while others simply do not want to move on.

“I’d say that at Fremantle prison there are about eight to 10 ‘real’ ghosts that I’ve come across, rather than just what I call residual energies.”

Residual energies, according to Anthony, are what most people would describe as ghosts – the woman at the window who appears at the same time

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every night but doesn't do anything more than gaze mournfully. Real ghosts, he says, are conscious of their surroundings and will interact with you, moving things around in an attempt to let you know that they are there.

"In front of about 50 witnesses," says Anthony, "we were in the chapel area of the prison on a rainy day. Suddenly a handprint appeared on the windowpane, as if somebody had blown hot hair onto the glass. Then a number appeared beneath it, it was incredible."

Research revealed the number to be a prisoner's identity number from the 1890s, who had been held in that cell.

Anthony says he has, at times, been terrified by some apparitions.

"One of my most scary moments was when I was threatened by what I believe was a guard at the Old Asylum in Fremantle. It was during a TV show I was taking part in, and there had been reports of activity around a particular staircase – the smell of burning, because it was close to where they had done electro-therapy on patients in the past."

As Anthony walked down the corridor towards the staircase, the temperature plummeted and he was confronted by a terrifying man.

"The only way out was past this man, who followed me and wanted to push me down the stairs. I wanted to race outside but didn't think it would look too good, in front of the TV cameras, to be the medium, scared out of their wits."

Such physical interaction between ghosts and the living is not unusual, says Anthony.

"There's an Aboriginal guy who haunts Section 43 of the prison, who will grab people round the throat if they are anything to do with the police – he hated the police."

Anthony has also experienced ghostly occurrences at the old Guildford Hotel, before it was gutted in a fire late last year.

"In the cellar, which was used as a storage space for smugglers bringing in liquor from the Swan River, I'm very aware of the old owner Thomas, he's very present there. And a little girl, who fell off a balcony is also there."

Graham believes the popularity of ghost stories help those who tell them and those who give them credence create a sense of place in the land within which they live.

"It helps people root themselves in a place, and create traditions and legends which seem older than they actually are. Aboriginal culture, for instance, does not have the same tradition of ghost stories, though one tribe does have the idea of a Ghost Bush, which is where spirits go once they have passed on. A lot of WA's ghost stories



OTHER EYES: Medium Anthony Grzelka (above) and, right, Fremantle Prison, which Anthony believes is haunted by a former Aboriginal prisoner.

are in the European tradition – wronged women, headless folk – but unlike Europe, there aren't any ghostly aristocrats roaming about. Our ghosts are further down the social scale generally. A lot of Australia's ghost stories in general are very specifically related to circumstances created by the land, stories of hardship and trying to beat the odds."

There are plenty of Internet sites where the enthusiastic ghost hunter can join in the debate and swap supernatural stories. A radio station dedicated to ghosts is perhaps one of the more unusual expressions of this unearthly passion, but for those who believe that we never truly leave this Earth, there are plenty of opportunities to test their faith. ●

*Albany Gaol Tours, Kit and Bev Rowley, (08) 9845 1020, historicalbany.com.au/convictgaol.htm
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