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That's the spirit

Beyond the brochure

This Surrey pile once appeared on *Most Haunted*, but its ghosts are friendly

If he were ever to see a ghost, the physicist Brian Cox, *Generation X*'s favourite TV geek, reckons it would be proof that the second law of thermodynamics was "s***", a prospect far more scary to the rationalist mind than a headless horseman. How people react to the idea of the paranormal probably says a lot more about them than about the actual existence – or not – of apparitions, poltergeists and the rest of the paranormal posse.

You've got the bereaved, who understandably cling on to any sign that a dead loved one is still somehow watching out for them from the "other side". And you've got me: *Scooby-Doo* is about as hardcore as I can take my spook-based entertainment. I watch through my fingers until the "phantom" is unmasked as the evil fairground owner in a sheet. Yet I also find the whole subject a bit of a yawn.

So my attention drifted as Fred Batt, resident "demonologist" (what does it say on his passport application form?) on *Most Haunted*, presented by the glamorous ghostbuster and former *Blue Peter* star Yvette Fielding, was telling me about the most disturbing manifestation he'd ever experienced. An abandoned monastery in the Czech Republic, villagers wouldn't go near it, satanic apparitions, a Nazi connection, Latin incantations, a darkened chapel at midnight... yadda yadda, sorry, where were we? Fascinating, I'm sure, but the reality of Fred's exceptional house and, indeed, his life story are far more riveting.

Though I did approach the electric gates of the grade II listed Clockhouse, near Horsham, feeling a bit trepidatious – I'd seen the pictures of the suits of armour in the heavily beamed entrance hall, obviously the perfect setting for weird goings-on. But the sight of four bigger-than-life-size verdigris horses rearing up in a corner of the grounds brought me up short. They looked just like the ones that used to adorn the front of Caesars, on the stretch of Streatham High Road that was south London's apologetic answer to Las Vegas.

Well, turns out they are the same ones: Fred used to own Caesars, London's biggest purpose-built ballroom, and the Forum club next door. A veteran of the nocturnal world – in the 1960s, he ran the Whisky a Go Go club, in Soho, and he says he invented go-go dancing – he sold his Streatham establishments a few years ago to property developers.



The Clockhouse is owned by a London nightclub impresario turned celebrity 'demonologist'



The Clockhouse, Horsham, Surrey £2.95m

What you get A six-bedroom country house with a restored Elizabethan barn – and 4.5 acres of landscaped grounds
Who to call Fuxtans; 01483 400000, fuxtans.co.uk



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By that time, Fred was already living in the house next door, from which vantage point he kept a covetous eye on the Clockhouse, a historic beauty with medieval origins, an Elizabethan hall house at its core and Georgian and Victorian extensions. He finally managed to buy it in 2002, for about £850,000. "It felt like the house had been waiting for me to bring it to life," he recalls. There were only "two rooms you could live in", and it cost double the money he'd paid to "put it right".

He had the usual negotiations with the conservation authorities, to be expected with a house of such antiquity, with a priest's hole (now in the corner of a bathroom) and original Georgian frescoed panels on one wall. He brought in the people who fitted out his London nightclubs to do it all; apparently, they easily picked up historic building techniques.

While they restored each part of the house to the style of its own period, including wallpaper printed from original Georgian and Victorian wood blocks, Fred was busy buying up stuff from auctions to furnish all 21 rooms: the rather sinister explanation for the suits of armour. One of his many careers – there's also fairground roustabout, actor (*EastEnders*) and trader in posh cars – was as an antiques dealer.

So any of the contents "could be for sale". The grounds also got plenty of attention, as he detangled the walled garden, cleared the lake and put in fountains and classical statuary (though it turns out a lot of that's from Caesars, too). There's a large Elizabethan brick barn that's currently a multi-car garage with a fairground-themed party space above, but Fred reckons that could be a separate house, with its own driveway.

What I know you really want to know is, where are the ghosts? Over to Fred: "This house is so friendly, it's not really haunted [though that's not what a 2003 episode of *Most Haunted* claimed]. I'm so glad to get back here for peace and tranquillity after what we do on the show. It's just a nice feeling. Yvette comes here to relax."

Brian Cox and the second law of thermodynamics would be safe, too.

ASK THE EXPERTS

The architect

How do you choose a manufacturer of long-lasting double-glazing units? I attempted to repair the misted sections in my windows by drilling sideways into the space and ventilating by air pump, but it provided only temporary relief.

PP, by email

For starters, contact the company that originally fitted the windows (if you can), as many will offer demisting services for double-glazed units. But that will only be a short-term solution. Glazing technology has advanced rapidly in the past decade, so replacing the units could be an opportunity to improve the energy performance of your home. Phil Brown, technical advisory service manager at Pilkington UK, says the true success of sealed double-glazing units is first and foremost about correct installation.

A drained and ventilated window frame system may prevent prolonged contact of moisture with the edge seal of the double-glazing unit – a common cause of reduced lifespan. Periodic checking and maintenance of the window after installation is key. Some suppliers offer 10-year warranties, although actual lifespans will normally be considerably longer, at about 25 years. Ensure that the unit is CE-marked and tested to the standard BS EN 1279.

Greg Toon is the founder of Potential etc...; potentialetc.com

The letting agent

Our local council has issued green garden waste bins, and my tenant feels that I should pay the annual charge. Who has responsibility for paying this fee?

MD, by email

I am often asked this, because many local authorities now charge for garden waste collection. The tenancy agreement you signed will set out both landlord and tenant obligations. Your tenant should not really feel hard done by, as it is normally the tenant's obligation to maintain the garden – so it follows that they should pay the annual "green bin" charge. If, on the other hand, you as the landlord are responsible for garden maintenance, then the charge will be yours to pay. It is wise to include a mention of this in the tenancy agreement, and to ensure that it is noted on the inventory, as there is often a further charge for replacement bins. Use stick-on numerals to identify the bin to your property.

Frank Webster is a director at the Oxford branch of the lettings agency Finders Keepers; finders.co.uk



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