

Getting into the spirit at Southam with Sandra Shannon

You wouldn't go into a pub and not expect to find spirits, but the Olde Mint in Southam boasts not only the liquid ones but the heavenly type too.

As well as all the usual things on offer, a pint of ale, a bite to eat and lively down to earth company, there's always the chance of a close encounter with the resident ghost!

This distinctive 14th century listed building built of stone with mullioned windows and timber beams is managed by Liz and Richard Boff, and it seems they are regularly visited by a number of friendly spirits.

Liz says that although she didn't know the pub was haunted when they took it on, it doesn't bother her. This mum of four has been in the pub trade with her husband for 20 years and it is not the first time they have experienced unearthly encounters.

In 1999 she and Richard ran the Royal Oak in Bedworth, Warwickshire, which had been the scene of a family tragedy in the 60s. Although the building was knocked down some of the original bricks were used to rebuild it. The bar staff often heard

Southam Fact File

- The name Southam means 'the southern hamlet' – a reference to its geographical position in relation to Long Itchington.
- The town was once a well used stopover for travellers on their way to Oxford or London, and stands on the route of the ancient Welsh Road.
- In the 19th century coins were discovered in the churchyard indicating a Roman settlement around AD250-350, and the first documentary evidence dates back to AD 998.
- The town passed to the Prior of Coventry in 1047.
- It is recorded in the Domesday book of 1086.
- Henry III granted the town a market charter in 1227.

and Liz have been at the pub there have been many strange happenings that cannot easily be explained.

Liz says, "Two years ago in the middle of a really hot summer, Richard was getting ready to go to bed. He walked from the lounge towards our bedroom and when he reached the stairs to the office he saw a black figure. It wouldn't move so eventually he walked through it. As he did, he felt an unnatural icy cold. That night in bed he found he could not get warm. It did unsettle him a little, but we were told it may have been a portal, that is, a place where a spirit is moving from one world to another."

Customers have on occasion told Liz they can sense something and her bar staff have had unusual things happen to them too.

a child's voice crying out "mum, mummy," downstairs, even though Liz's own children were upstairs in a different room.

After moving to the Olde Mint which stands on Southam's main road, the couple discovered that it is well known to be haunted and apparently a photograph was taken of a group of men, which when developed showed a lady wearing a long white dress with lace hanging over her hands.

In the seven years Richard



• The Old Mint, where King Charles is said to have had silver cast into coins after the Battle of Edgehill (see page 22 of this month's magazine)

Sharon Caley has worked at the pub for four months and has already had a ghostly experience. She says, "I was standing by the bar and suddenly felt a very cold draft around my legs; I don't know where it came from as there were no windows or doors open."

Both Liz and Sharon have said they sometimes smell aromas like cinnamon, even though that particular spice is not used.

Liz says, "One time a man in dark clothing was seen in the corridor, he would walk quickly one way but slowly on the way back, as though carrying something heavy. On another occasion two of my staff caught a glimpse of a cat in the pub; they both heard it miaowing and followed the direction it went only to find that it had disappeared."

She continues, "Some previous owners who had the pub in the 60s told how they would see a little boy upstairs and when they were in bed he used to pull their hair. They added that even on a hot summers day it could be freezing cold upstairs."

It's hardly surprising that the Olde Mint has a ghost or two, as it's said to be the third oldest building in Southam, the second being the chemist and the oldest the parish church of St James.

