

Simon Marsden, photographer

Maison-Hantee.com : Mister Marsden, through your work, you are a ghosthunter but above all, you are a great artist. Where does this passion for the world of ghosts come from ?

Simon Marsden : I spent my childhood in a haunted manor house in a remote area of the English countryside. My father had a large library of books on the occult and would often tell us four children (I was the youngest) ghost stories by the fire before we went to bed. I was the one who slept in the haunted room and all this obviously made a great impression on me – so much so that I now begin to think that my obsession for photographing haunted sites may be my attempt to exorcise these genuine adolescent fears of the supernatural.

Maison-Hantee.com : Great Britain can not be thought of without ghosts. Do you think it comes from the fact that there are so many haunted places, or is it simply because people talk more openly about it ?

S.M. : Yes in Western Europe Great Britain is always thought of as the home of ghosts although I have found a belief in the supernatural in other forms to be as strong in say Eastern Europe and the Far East. Perhaps the English, Irish, Scots and Welsh are more relaxed when talking about the subject as they have in general accepted the possibility of the existence of ghosts for so many centuries, and don't find it an intellectual or scientific problem to discuss these beliefs.

Maison-Hantee.com : There are many types of ghosthunters: spiritualist, scientist.....I think you have chosen the artistic and folklorist way. Why did you go down this road ?

S.M. : I suppose firstly because I am an artist and secondly because I always believed in ghosts, so there was no need for me to prove their existence!! I don't try to convince the reader/viewer that ghosts exist, merely suggest that they should not take everything that surrounds them at face value, that not everything might be quite as it seems.

Maison-Hantee.com : According to you, can we say that it is more interesting to suggest the existence of ghosts through art than simply to prove or not prove their existence? If so, why ?

S.M. : I have always thought that in a disbelieving, cynical world it was pointless to attempt to prove the existence of ghosts. One could waste a lifetime trying to prove that one had taken a photograph of a ghost – I prefer to spend that time visiting and documenting these locations. I have a personal collection of ghost images from over 35 years of work but I don't show them to other people because it might become too great a distraction – maybe I will at a later date when I intend to publish my diaries.

Maison-Hantee.com : Who are your favourite ghost-story authors ?

S.M. : M.R.James - my father knew him when he was at Cambridge University. Arthur Machen – his stories mirror my personal beliefs. Edgar Allan Poe – the gothic master

Maison-Hantee.com : So, could you say that you really believe in ghosts yourself?

Definitely – I have experienced, seen and photographed many supernatural phenomena over the past 45 years.

Maison-Hantee.com : If you do, are you scared of them ?

S.M. : Like everyone else I am frightened of the unknown.

Maison-Hantee.com : Do you think they are evil or kind ?

S.M. : Both, just as there are good and bad people amongst the living, the spirits of the departed must surely reflect this ?

Maison-Hantee.com : Don't you think that it is naïve today to believe in ghosts ?

S.M. : No, the opposite. Now that many people have made science and technology their God believing that it can explain and control everything in our modern day world it just seems to become clearer that this is not the case. For example, many ancient medicines are being proved to be more effective than present day drugs.

During the disastrous events of the tsunami in the Far East, Stone Age tribesman on a remote island were at first presumed to have been wiped out but survived intact along with their animals as they had taken to the hills hours before the tidal waves struck – their closeness to nature and sixth sense had saved them.

Maison-Hantee.com : What are, according to you, the qualities that a good ghosthunter should have ?

S.M. : An open mind and great patience. Don't ever expect to witness anything at a reputedly haunted site - it could happen anywhere.

Maison-Hantee.com : Haunting phenomena are often connected to dramatic facts. In your opinion is this always the case ?

S.M. : In most cases, yes. However there are sightings of people who return to the places that they loved purely because they never wanted to leave. They didn't meet a violent end, just died peacefully in their beds.

Maison-Hantee.com : If you believe in ghosts, do you believe they are deceased souls, or simply images printed from the past ?

S.M. : Definitely deceased souls that cannot or will not rest.

Maison-Hantee.com : If ghosts are the souls of dead people, why do they come back in our world ?

S.M. : I suspect it is either because they were not ready to leave it in the first place by their unexpected death, or that they simply wish to remain for whatever reason – searching for something or other unfinished business, love of a certain place etc.

Maison-Hantee.com : Do you think that it is possible to communicate with them?

S.M. : Yes, they appear to be trying to communicate with us.

Maison-Hantee.com : Do you think that they have to teach us something ?

S.M. : If you mean 'do they have something to teach us ?' – yes they do, to question everything that surrounds us, not to take it at face value – in short to open our minds to all things.

Maison-Hantee.com : Ghost stories exist since the ancient time. Today they still appear in the headlines of newspapers around the world. How do you explain this ?

S.M. : Mankind does not change. His fascination with the unknown and death will always be there. Bring up the subject of ghosts at a dinner party and note how the whole atmosphere of the conversation changes – everybody has an opinion whether for or against, we are now talking on a completely different level, a spiritual plane that rises above the mundane.

Maison-Hantee.com : What do you think about 'Most Haunted' the famous English TV series ?

S.M. : To be honest I have never seen it, but from what I have read, and what people tell me, it sounds more like a reality TV show than a serious programme on ghosts.

Maison-Hantee.com : What are your future projects ?

S.M. : I have just finished a book for ENGLISH HERITAGE on their haunted sites titled "THIS SPECTRED ISLE" which will be published in April. Then I start work on LA FRANCE HANTÉE for Flammarion which will be published in October 2006.

Maison-Hantee.com : Are you planning to do a photo exhibition in France anytime soon ?

S.M. : Yes, when LA FRANCE HANTÉE is published. Information will be posted on my website www.simonmarsden.co.uk nearer the time.

Maison-Hantee.com : Would you like to add a word for Maison-Hantee.com ?

S.M. : Simply to thank them for this interview and especially Erick Fearson for being so supportive in helping me to find haunted locations to photograph in France. Obviously anybody visiting this website who may also know of any haunted locations in France that I could photograph for my forthcoming book is welcome to email me at info@marsdenarchive.com