

# SPIRITS on TAP

*When I started a new job in a pub, I felt a spooky presence. Was something – or someone – there with me? By Claire Kirk, 49*

Me in The Playhouse

**S**trolling up the high street with my headphones in, I smiled.

I was about to start my first shift at my local Wetherspoons in Colchester, Essex, and I couldn't wait.

I'd just moved from Romford and worked at a Wetherspoons back in East London, so it was easy to get a transfer.

As I made my way through the doors, I looked around in awe.

'Wow,' I whispered to myself.

My new place of work was the historic Playhouse Wetherspoons and oozed history.

It originally opened in 1929 as a theatre before becoming a cinema in the 1930s.

In 1981, it became a bingo

hall for a few years before it closed and reopened as a pub in 1994.

As I looked around, I noticed there were framed theatre and movie posters from years gone by.

Then, glancing up, I gasped. The theatre still had its old seating stalls up on the balcony – with an array of celebrity

cardboard cutouts in the seats.

The celebs looked like they were staring at the pub goers below – which was a little unnerving!

Clocking me, my new manager made his way over with a smile on his face.

'You must be Claire,' he said

as he shook my hand. 'Welcome to The Playhouse!'

'Thank you so much,' I smiled back as I shook his hand. 'This place certainly is different to the last pub I worked in.'

'Oh yes, it might take some getting used to when it comes to those cutouts,' he laughed.

That day, he gave me an

induction and introduced me to my new team.

I was going to be working in the kitchen and quickly took to my new role.

'Make sure to keep the lights off in the storeroom when you're not in there,' my manager told me one day.

The storeroom was up a spiral staircase and felt a little eerie.

One night, I was on my break during a late shift.

Making my way to the staff area, I took my phone with me to use the torch as the staircase was dark.

But I must have gone a level too far – as I ended up on the balcony with the cutouts.

I immediately felt a ripple of unease wash over me as I peered down over the stalls.

Looking at the bar and the

punters chattering below, I felt really creeped out, so hastily made my way back down to the staffroom.

'You all right, Claire?' one of my workmates asked.

'You look like you've seen a ghost!' another laughed. 'Don't tell me you went right up to the top, did you?'

I nodded.

'Oh no,' he said. 'No one ever goes up there – it's really creepy.'

'I'll keep that in mind,' I laughed nervously.

Later in the shift, I was busy clearing up for the evening with one other kitchen hand.

As I wiped down the worktops, I felt someone brush past me.

It was that same feeling you get when you feel someone walk over your grave.

I quickly spun around, expecting to see my colleague behind me. But to my horror, he wasn't even in the room!

I felt the hairs stand up on the back of my neck.

When my workmate walked back in 10 minutes later, I

The framed memorabilia

asked, 'Has anyone ever died here?'

He went white as a sheet. 'Someone did actually,' he replied. 'It was nearly 10 years ago.'

He went on to explain that originally the pub was run by a husband and wife duo, but that he'd only ever met the woman.

'Where did the husband go?' I asked.

'One evening, a man was in here having a drink when a fight broke out. He ended up being stabbed to death near the tables and chairs towards the back, on what would've been the former stage,' he said.

I gasped in horror.

'The manager tried to help but it was no use, he was unable to ever step foot back in the pub after that, so his wife ran this place on her own,' he explained.

She had since left, and the pub was under new management, so I tried to put it out of my mind.

A few hours later, it was the end of my shift and I got into my pre-booked taxi home.

I got chatting to the taxi driver and I explained to her that I'd only recently moved to the area.

'Well you're my last job of the night,' she said. 'I know Colchester quite well, I can drive you around and show you some of the haunted spots if you like.'

I knew Colchester was an ancient town and was once the capital of England, so I was very intrigued to see where she'd take me.

She drove me past the castle, along the old Roman wall, and some of the town's old pubs which I found fascinating.

When she dropped me home, I got in and noticed some post on the floor.

Ever since I'd moved in, I'd received letters addressed to an

old tenant.

My landlord said he'd stopped paying the rent and told me to bin them.

A few hours later, it was the

end of my shift and I got into

my pre-booked taxi home.

I scooped up the envelopes,

put them on the side and made my way to bed.

Unable to sleep, I picked

up my laptop and started to research more about the incident that took place in the pub.

I came across a news article that included the name of the victim and his address.

I was floored – he'd lived in my house!

Not only did I work where he'd been killed, but I lived in the same address.

I felt a wave of sadness wash over me, as I read on.

The victim, Andrew, was just 20.

He was stabbed by a former friend, over a stolen purse.

A jury at Chelmsford Crown Court cleared him of murder, and instead convicted him of

manslaughter on the grounds of provocation.

As I read on, I realised it was the anniversary of his death.

Could he have brushed past me in the kitchen? I thought.

At my next shift, I asked a few of my colleagues if they'd ever had any spooky experiences while in the pub, and people said they'd heard banging on the walls, and felt the room randomly go cold.

I once saw a woman dressed in white walk across the pub, but when I looked again, she was gone,' one workmate said.

I'd always been an open minded person when it came to spirits, but now I was confident that ghosts existed.

Instead of feeling scared, I've come to think that the Wetherspoons ghosts just want their stories remembered.

It seems that when the pub falls silent after last orders, the Playhouse feels most alive.



By Danielle Lett

The Playhouse

