

The night the ghost said

Welloooo

With filming for the all-girl *Ghostbusters* movie underway, intrepid writer Paul Ewart spent the night with their real-life Aussie ghost-hunting counterparts



Me, ghost hunting with Michelle and Rayleen

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A pub with a ghostly reputation



I'll admit I'm a scaredy cat. While I can handle a horror movie, the thought of *actually* experiencing something supernatural fills me with dread.

So, when two of Sydney's top paranormal investigators invited me to join them for an evening, my reaction was mixed. Determined to conquer my fears, I bit the bullet and discovered these girl ghostbusters ain't afraid of no ghosts.

Rayleen Kabl, AGE, has more than two

decades of ghost-busting experience in everything from former asylums and old graveyards to ghost-plagued suburban semis.

'I'm a medium by day, paranormal investigator by night!' she tells me, laughing.

The mum of three recalls the first time she saw a ghost.

'I was three. I told Mum that a man kept following me. I could point to where he was but no-one else could see him.'

Her colleague Michelle Janes, 43, came to ghost-hunting five years ago.

'My first investigation was at a cemetery. I was scared but went with it,' she says. 'The more I went on, the more curious and less scared I became.'

Hmmm... I wonder if that'll work for me....?

The ghost hunt

8pm

Rayleen, Michelle and I set up base inside the bar and discuss our plan. During our recce of the building, I notice reminders of the Hero's past.

The downstairs cellars have shackles on the walls and the entrance to the smuggler's tunnel is still visible.

While taking pictures, a sudden blast of cold air hits us. Rayleen looks at me and smiles. 'Oh, it's busy here!' she says. *Great...*

9pm

We enter the Duke Room – an upstairs area where staff have reported feeling something 'blow' on their necks. Michelle sets up an array of devices. Night vision cameras, motion detectors, audio recorders...

Rayleen says she can see the image of a tall man leaning against the fireplace. Michelle tells me not to be afraid, explaining nastier entities may feed on fear. *Eek.*

The lights are switched off and Rayleen introduces us to any entities present. 'Often spirits want to communicate,' she says. 'Not to scare us but to tell their story.'

She asks them to make themselves known. Seconds later she and Michelle gasp. From their corner of the room they tell me they heard a voice say 'shhh'.

10pm

Rayleen is focussed on the fireplace, which – unknown to her – has been the focal point for activity. She says that the spirits want to touch us. She gives her permission to be touched and instructs us to do the same. 'Yes', I say insincerely. I definitely do *not* want to be touched! Some time after, I swear I feel a heavy pressure on my neck and my blood chills. Then, both Rayleen and Michelle

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turn their gaze to the corner of the room where I'm sitting and declare that there's an entity with me. Cue swift exit.

11pm

The cellar is next. Rayleen announces she feels dizzy. Despite not knowing the history, it seems she's picked up on the spot where tragic Anne Kirkman was killed more than 150 years ago.

Rayleen senses multiple male presences. She feels like something's coming from the corner near the old stairs. Michelle sees a moving shadow and suddenly we all hear a scuffle on the floor.

Midnight

I pluck up courage to spend time in the cellar alone. Rayleen and Michelle leave me in the pitch black. I position myself next to the sealed opening of the

smugglers tunnel and wait, imagining the fate of the sailors who found themselves shackled here. Suddenly the hairs on my arms stand up.

There's a noise... a shriek! My breathing quickens.

A rat reveals itself from a crevice. I let out a cry of terror and bolt for the stairs.

1am

We regroup in the cellar. Michelle and Rayleen pick up presences. 'A vicious feeling. That's what I get here,' says Rayleen. 'It's different to the energy upstairs, which is welcoming and playful.'

Perhaps due to tiredness, I too am picking up on things.

Shadows appear to be moving. While I'd very much like to see something definite, at the same time I'm desperate not to. It's scary!

2am

We end our investigation. Rayleen is positive she connected with at least two spirits and Michelle has audio recordings, video footage and camera stills to go through.

For them it's just another night, for me, it's been an adventure. We say goodbye and I spirit myself to bed, where sleep is interrupted by dreams of ghosts and rats.

The aftermath

In the light of day, my fear fades. I have a message from Rayleen who has gone through the audio and video recordings and says she's caught a voice saying 'hello' in the cellar.

She sends me the file and, sure enough, amid the crackle of static and the hum of background noise, a female voice comes through.

Michelle has digital pictures showing multiple light particles or 'orbs' – which she says are a sign of spirits

attempting to show themselves.

Was I scared in the pub? Yes. Am I believer? The jury's still out.

I am curious though and I don't think my career as a ghost-hunter is over just yet... ●

The location

The scene of the ghost hunt is the Hero of Waterloo hotel in Sydney. Serving patrons for 170 years, it's one of Australia's oldest pubs.

Built by convicts, it was favoured by rum smugglers who used a secret tunnel running from its cellars to the harbour. The publican had a sideline in drugging unsuspecting sailors, who would be dropped through a trapdoor into the cellar, shackled and taken through the tunnel to waiting whale ships where they would become forced labour.

In 1849, landlady Anne Kirkman was thrown down the cellar steps by her husband Thomas.

Current owner, Kazuko Nelson, says staff and customers have encountered her ghost. 'Often when we stay in the apartment above the pub in the night we'll hear the piano playing,' she says matter-of-factly.

'You can hear footsteps in the cellar or on the stairs. We've had customers see the ghost of a woman in the bathroom mirrors. I've had them run away screaming!'

WORDS BY PAUL EWART PHOTO ISTOCKPHOTO

Entrance to the smuggler's tunnel



Rayleen senses orbs around Kazuko and me

