

## **Coalhouse Fort, East Tilbury, Essex**

A Victorian coastal defence fort set in parkland next to the river Thames at East Tilbury, Essex. The fort was completed in 1874, on the site of previous gun batteries, to defend the approaches to London from the perceived threat of invasion from France and other continental powers. It is one of many such forts and batteries built in response to the Royal Commission of 1860 and are now referred to as Palmerston Forts. The fort continued its role as a military establishment through two world wars although with the development of longer range artillery, its function in defending the approach to the capital had become secondary by World War II. In 1962 the fort and surrounding works were sold to Thurrock Council. Since 1983 the fort has been leased to the Coalhouse Fort Project, a voluntary organisation, who have rescued the building from total dereliction and their long term aim is to restore the building to something resembling its original condition when it was home to a military garrison. (Sourced from [www.coalhousefort.co.uk](http://www.coalhousefort.co.uk))

On arrival at Coalhouse Fort we were impressed by the overall size of the place and were looking forward to what the night ahead had in store for us. Would the SI team come face to face with any of the reported paranormal activity? We were intrigued to find out whom or what haunts this fantastic location and why they still do so. A very active night for the whole team, it was amazing how active it is - the atmosphere around the fort was electric, whilst you walked from area to area the atmosphere was felt to change dramatically. With the lights out it was immediately apparent just how pitch black the tunnels were, absolutely no natural light was present and it is difficult to recall any other location we have investigated in which your eyes cannot adjust at all. In such an environment one might expect some of the team to show increased nerves or perhaps a little panic from time to time, however all credit due to the investigators present as this was not a problem at any stage during the night.

We can't give too many details away here at the request of the Fort's trustees, as it is much more interesting when similar encounters are reported by other investigative teams and the information isn't in the public domain. What we can say though is that Coalhouse Fort is perhaps the most active location we have investigated over the last ten years, all of the team came away with something unexplainable. Two of the team actually witnessed a full apparition in one area, which besides being a first for one of them and only a second for the other, was made all the more interesting by the fact that two of the fort's trustees have also reported the same thing in the same area. There was a wealth of information picked up by both the group's main sensitives, which when pieced together with some of the hunches picked up by the team's non psychic members makes for a compelling and harrowing account of the past. Some of the fort's staff were amazed at what was picked up, given that they knew we had not be informed of any details of the fort's history and the encounters previously reported by other visitors.

Strange sounds were abundant during our time here, some heard by all the team, sometimes just heard by one or two members. Often these and the other encounters from the night were not where we would have expected potential phenomenon to occur. At one point one investigator had to leave a certain area, an experience shortly repeated with another team member, most unusual for either of them to be affected in such a way. Just as we were packing up things began to become really interesting for some of us, despite now being relatively comfortable with the dark environment, the audio phenomenon seemed to increase to two separate pairs of investigators. One would expect the longer you stay within an unfamiliar environment, the less frequent any strange noises would be reported. Certainly at the end of the night, when arousal levels are low and many people's interest and expectations are also down, you would not expect previously quiet areas to suddenly jump into life. However this was the case at Coalhouse, made more interesting by the fact that one of those hearing the phenomenon was one of the fort's guides. Someone who is very used to the Fort and its peculiar noises, who was as white faced as we were!

We are returning in 2009 to see if any of this phenomenon is repeated and to see if perhaps a re-visit can offer potential explanations for what was encountered. There is quite a lot of hype regarding this location and one or two of us were quite sceptical in the lead up to this investigation; how wrong we were and how right previous visitors have been when they say this is one location not for the faint hearted... Join us if you dare!