

Landlady's in good spirits

Picture: ROBERT BERRY



MINE GHOST: Landlady Karen Barrett watches as spiritualist Donna Gearing checks the meter

Pub hunt for ghost of infamous smuggler

By NEIL CLEMENTS

THE leader of a notorious smuggling gang is one of the guests invited to an extraordinary pub event being held in Kent next month.

Those who have bought tickets to the all-night session at the Walnut Tree Inn at Aldington, near Ashford, are anticipating the appearance of George Ransley.

But they don't know for sure that the leader of the Blues, otherwise known as the Aldington Gang, will turn up – because he died in 1856.

Ransley's ghost is said to haunt the ancient pub because it was the headquarters of his gang, the last large-scale contraband operation of the great smuggling era in Kent which held sway from Romney Marsh to Deal.

The landlady of the 13th century pub, Karen Barrett, has organised a night of paranormal investigation to see if a team of ghost hunters can prove once and for all that the 'presences' in the building are wayward spirits.

Mrs Barrett is convinced that the "shadowy" figure that roams the hostelry is the spirit of Ransley and she refers to it as George.

Although Ransley was transported to Tasmania, where he died after having become prosperous and the father of more than a dozen children, Mrs Barrett thinks his spirit may have returned home to the place where he held sway before being banished.

She told Kent On Sunday that soon after taking over the pub she was aware of "a presence" looking over her shoulder in the kitchen.

Then her two young children told her that a man in their parents' bedroom had given them each "a piece".

Mrs Barrett says glasses have appeared to throw themselves from

shelves and a bell in a bar has rung when no one was in the room.

She has also felt an all-enveloping weight pressing down on her in the night which seems to block out all noise except the sound of breathing.

But she adds it's "not a bad presence" and the family has not been frightened by it, although her husband, Graham, who does not believe in ghosts, has been "spooked" by some events that have taken place there. He and the children will be out for the night when fee-paying guests take part in the paranormal investigation being staged by Ghost Search UK on September 25.

Organised by spiritualist medium Donna Gearing, of New Romney, the quest for

metaphysical evidence will involve séances, Ouija board sessions, the use of detection equipment and video recordings.

Donna is touring pubs throughout the South East in the quest for evidence of life beyond the grave.

She told Kent On Sunday: "Pictures taken in the eves at the Oak and Ivy in Hawkhurst found it to be crammed with floating 'orbs'. Some believe these could be caused by spirits entering our energy field and some say they are the first stage of spirit manifestation."

Mrs Gearing and her team attempt to rid places of problematic entities. "We don't call it an exorcism because, I don't care what anyone says, you cannot order spirits to leave as they have freedom of choice. It has to be made to sound as if it is in their best interests to go."