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Investigators' e-Bulletin

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MICHAEL BENTINE MEMORIAL AWARD

This year the Michael Bentine shield, together with a small permanent memento trophy, were awarded to Cherill Penton for her report SCP10 documenting an investigation into a domestic haunting in Staffordshire. Highly commended was report TS01 documenting an investigation into a farmhouse in Wiltshire - this was jointly produced by Dave Wood, Nicky Sewell, Trystan Swale, Dr Simon Sherwood and Steve Wills.

LEADERSHIP OF INVESTIGATIONS DEPT

Cherill Penton has decided to stand down as Joint NIC. Bill would like to thank her for her efforts during the years that she has acted as Deputy, and then Joint, NIC. Cherill has demonstrated particular efficiency in dealing with applications for AAI status, issuing AAI identity cards and putting together the Investigators' e-Bulletin. ASSAP's Executive is currently considering the replacement manning of the Investigations Dept.

CURRENT CASES

- A report has been received from Simon Royce-Dexter on the case in which he and Cherill Penton investigated a case of children seeing and speaking to a 'ghost' at a house in the West Midlands. It was observed in this case that the client seemed to be wanting the investigators to declare that her daughter was psychic but of course this could not be done solely on the basis of subjective evidence having been provided by the client.
- With regard to the pub in Greater London which Michael Lewis has been investigating, the scientific methods of investigation have been exhausted without finding normal explanations for some of the phenomena and so Michael has utilised mediums to try to uncover information about the cause of the phenomena. Whilst mediumistically obtained information can never, from a scientific perspective, be taken at face value, if handled carefully, it can from time to time be used to verify witness statements or to research correlations between features of spontaneous psychic phenomena and past building occupants.
- Contrary to the image portrayed by fictitious (and sometimes supposedly factual) films and TV programmes, ghostly problems are not restricted to gothic mansions, as demonstrated by another of Michael's cases, as it involved a council flat in a tower block in Greater London. Reported phenomena included objects going missing, a feeling of a presence, electrical problems and an overly aggressive cat. The report submitted on this case reveals that the last of these problems was subsequently found to be due to the cat suffering a thyroid problem. Geopathic stress was a strong contender to explain the other phenomena, possibly inducing negative energies to the detriment of the family. This was not the first case where various domestic problems were uncovered and in which it seemed that negativity had fed on negativity, a paranormal hypothesis being that this could have drawn in undesirable spirit influences.
- In the Cheshire poltergeist case of Claire Lawton's, the client reported footsteps upstairs, shelves being knocked, lights going on and off, a rocking horse moving, a drawer locking and an apparition having been seen. The young son seemed to be aware of a presence, causing him to yell "Bad man!". Relationship problems caused the husband and children to move out, after which a vigil was held but no evidence for the paranormal was observed by the investigators. In various cases looked into by ASSAP, it seems that once domestic negativity has been addressed, the alleged phenomena die down. However, despite the investigators concluding that this seemed to have happened in this case, the wife was still sure that spirits were bothering her and so Bill put Claire in touch with the appropriate official of the Spiritualists National Union (SNU) for the purpose of providing a medium who could offer closure to the client. As all AAIs will know, ASSAP's remit

is only to investigate phenomena and not to put a stop to them and so the best course of action to address phenomena that are actually problematic to the client is to refer the client to the appropriate agency, whether that be medical, spiritual or whatever. It is not uncommon for clients to insist, at the end of the day, on a spirit rescue being carried out. Any AAI in this situation who is unsure to whom to refer a client is advised to contact the NIC, who has contacts with the District Phenomena Reps of the SNU.

- A prospective client in Leicestershire reported that paint had inexplicably been sprayed over her lounge. Mick Baker has been trying to make contact with the client, in order to interview her.
- If any AAIs receive anomalous photographs from the public and are unsure how to assess them, they would be well advised to utilise the mine of information on this subject on ASSAP's website. <http://assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Photos.html> is a good place to start. Photographs which still defy explanation can be sent to Maurice Townsend (photoquery@assap.org) for analysis. One particularly impressive ghost image on a wedding photo taken in Gloucestershire (reported in the Daily Telegraph) seemed to give scope for further investigation and so George Gregg is both having the photograph examined by an imaging expert and is trying to track down the person who took the photo, to interview him about the circumstances.
- An ASSAP member who is not trained in investigations has brought to our attention the case of a pub in Essex where ghosts and unexplained noises have been reported and this has been passed to Kieron Savill to look into.
- Tamsin Ashmore and Bill have been to interview a lady who reported ghosts in her bedroom in Derbyshire. Appropriate questioning and probing led to the conclusion that most of what she was experiencing was hypnopompic hallucinations whilst in a state of sleep paralysis.
- Lee Norton has interviewed a couple in Devon who have been experiencing poltergeist phenomena and the clients have been left a carbon copy notebook to record any further incidents.
- A gentleman in Scotland has reported PK phenomena occurring in his house, the most worrying of which is his daughter being repeatedly locked in the attic. Craig Coomber is looking into this.
- Apparitions have been seen and unexplained voices heard at a house in Staffordshire. Terri Settington is intending to interview the couple experiencing this.
- A report in the Daily Mail indicated that a big cat had been attacking lots of sheep in Somerset. Stuart Andrews is trying to make contact with the farmer most affected to obtain further information.

Writing Investigation Reports

by Dave Wood, ASSAP Chairman

At the Training Weekend at Beverley Friary, November 2008, trainees were tasked to critique a typical paranormal group investigation report cribbed together from Internet websites, and to present the outline of a truly scientifically-focussed investigation report.

Trainees skilfully teased out one of the primary reasons why paranormal investigation reports are typically dismissed by the scientific research community. Typical investigation reports tend - and we have all been guilty of this - to focus on the gathering and presentation of anecdotal evidence. Anecdotal evidence, in all its cunning guises, will rarely be scientifically valuable.

The typical investigation report presented included: basic locations details, history of the location, equipment and significant readings, individual accounts of experiences in specific locations, selected 'interesting' photographs and audio and video footage.

The ideal report standard presented by trainees included:

- Basic details and participants, anonymised
- Abstract
- Material listings
- Introduction to the approach used in the investigation
- Full methodological statement as to what was done and why, in sufficient detail that the process could be repeated exactly. Trainees were keen to stress that a method should explain the rationale for the methods used: not just using equipment, experiments and methods demonstrated on the television for no real reason
- Statement of ethics: a demonstration of how the approach, method and analysis conform to set ethical standards
- Full, dispassionate reporting of all events and non-events
- A scientifically responsible analysis
- References to relevant literature used during analysis
- An Executive Summary that focuses especially on accessibility to clients.

Trainees also discussed barriers paranormal researchers might face in constructing a scientifically-focussed investigation report. Most of the reasons centred on skills levels within individual teams, and most especially the time available to produce lengthy reports. Some trainees explained that one or two people are tasked with doing all the work of producing investigation reports in a given team, and the time pressure was too great.

My own group - Paranormal Site Investigators (PSI) - produces such lengthy reports for each formal investigation conducted. PSI manages to split the workload effectively between all investigators, regardless of their attendance at a particular investigation. One portfolio holder is responsible for ensuring all others keep to deadline. The following is a simplified account of one month of report writing, for illustration purposes:

- On the day - the investigation co-ordinator ensures all portfolio holders leave the investigation with the resources required to complete their portfolio.
- At the end of week one:
 - Person A transcribes four Dictaphones worth of team reporting: two percipient teams, CCTV monitoring team and continuous Extraneous Factor Auditor (EFA) team
 - Person B produces accurate tables reflecting the investigation schedule, team allocations and mapping of where equipment units were placed
 - Person C views CCTV footage from non-percipient 'control' areas and produces a timed report of the physical environment
 - Person D inputs individual difference questionnaire data into a spreadsheet and produces a report-ready anonymised table
- At the end of week two:
 - Person E converts the raw Dictaphone transcripts into report ready tabularised summaries
 - Person F produces an overall report and graphs from data logging equipment
 - Person G examines the percipient report tables and makes request for audio, visual, photographic, EFA and data logging equipment evidence so that all events reported can be objectively verified
 - Person B converts the raw EFA transcripts into report ready tabularised summaries
- At the end of week three:
 - Person B accumulates statistics of reports by team, by area and by paranormal belief scale score
 - Person H supplies photographic evidence to verify individual reports
 - Person D supplies audio evidence to verify individual reports
 - Person I supplies video and CCTV evidence to verify individual reports
 - Person F supplies logging equipment evidence to verify individual reports
 - Person B supplies EFA evidence to verify individual reports
- At the end of week four:
 - Person G examines supplied evidence and categorises evidence based on its status of resolution, produces report-ready analyses and creates procedures for Category D experiments for the Analysis Investigation - to get to the bottom of unverified reports
 - Person B produces statistics based on classifications and provides report ready summaries of eyewitness accounts

- During week five, Person J completes the aggregation of the report ready sections into one document, although this tends to be an ongoing process throughout all five weeks. Person K then quality checks the report.

PSI finds this process well manageable where there are twelve investigators committed to giving four hours per month, under strict deadlines, regardless of whether they attended the investigation in the particular month.