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ABOUT ASSAP

The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena was formed in 1981 to study a wide range of paranormal phenomena. These fall into the broad categories of psychic phenomena, earth mysteries, Ufology and Fortean phenomena. ASSAP holds no corporate views and the views expressed by individual authors are their own.

ASSAP is a registered charity (327422) and a company limited by guarantee (2075226)

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Contact us at assapnews@assap.org

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Website Members' Area

The members area of the website is a fantastic resource, with forms and information for investigators as well as past copies of ASSAP News and Anomaly. Visit the website at www.assap.org and log into the members site:

Username: [assapmember](#)

Password: [haunted](#)

Are you on Email?

We like to keep in touch with members from time to time by email. If you haven't received an email from us please email your name and email address to chairman@assap.org so you can keep up to date!

Got a Case?

Do you know someone who has had an anomalous experience of any kind that they would like to see investigated by ASSAP? ASSAP has a network of investigators all over the UK who are ready to help.

Contact Bill Eyre on investigations@assap.org for more information.

Group

Are you a member of an investigation group? Does your group have one or more AAIs in a Investigation Leader position? If so, why not become an ASSAP Affiliate Group. Contact Lee Norton on groups@assap.org for more information.

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Contributions:

As well as our regular contributors columns ASSAP News accepts one-off or occasional contributions from any member to feature in our 'Focus On' Pages.

If you have an idea you'd like to discuss please email us on assapnews@assap.org

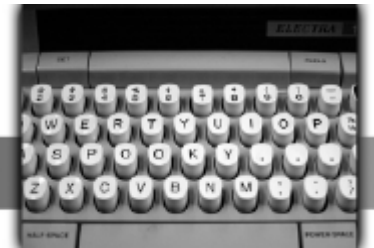
Submission Guidelines: Please email, or use our postal address, 400-600 words and at least one photograph on a relevant subject. If you would like to write a longer article please email us at assapnews@assap.org to discuss.

Submission Deadlines: Submission deadlines are the end of April, July, October and January of each year.

Longer articles and reviews: These are recommended to be submitted to Anomaly - ASSAP's Journal. Anomaly deadlines are the middle of August each year. Contact Anomaly by emailing anomaly@assap.org

THE NEWS

from the paranormal world



Trespassing Ghost Hunters Risk Arrest

Cherry Knowle Hospital in Ryhope, near Sunderland, a derelict psychiatric hospital, has long been associated with hauntings, but local police are taking a strong stance on those accessing the site without permission. There have been in excess of 12 arrests in the past year and authorities are warning people to keep away from the complex as the site is unsafe and contains asbestos.



Trespassing is not just restricted to kids looking for thrills by copying paranormal television programmes. Plenty of 'paranormal groups' list trespassing sites as 'investigations' on their websites. Our field of research is likely to be tarnished further in the future by such infringements.

ASSAP advocates the ethical (and legal!) approach of seeking permission to investigation sites.

Centre for Fortean Zoology plagued by ghost

The Centre for Fortean Zoology's head quarters in Devon, UK, have reported hearing footsteps, doors slamming and fleeting figures in recent weeks. A glowing ball of light has also been seen, and the sound of the gate opening with no apparent cause. Myrtle Cottage, where the headquarters are based, hosts the Centre which started in 1992 with the aim of researching and documenting mystery animals.

What's new pussy cat?

675 sightings of big cats were reported in across the UK in 2007, with over 30 being reported in Wiltshire alone. In excess of 10,000 reports have been made in Britain since 2002, but the source of these animals still elude experts. The most commonly cited explanation is the introduction of the Dangerous Animals Act in 1976 which allegedly lead to many private zoo and menagerie animals being set free. Over the past 32 years the cats are thought to have bred extensively throughout the British countryside leading to the proliferation of recent reports.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ghosts cause 200 students to flee

Lessons came to a halt this month after 200 students from the Sekolah Menengah Sains Dungun school in Malaysia claimed to have seen ghosts fly around the assembly hall, classrooms and dormitories. A woman dressed in white was seen to swoop through one lesson which resulted in panicked pupils being collected by their parents amid the mass hysteria. The school, at the time of writing, had been closed for four days.

Kenyan election loot cursed

Mystery illnesses and constipation dogged looters who stole goods during the recent unrest in Kenya during the latest elections. Rumours suggested that a Mombasan community elder had been brought in to curse the looters. The thieves have reportedly been adhering to the elders request to return looted timber within ten days for fear of being struck by the alleged curse.

\$487,000 spent to rid man of evil

After visiting a store-front psychic, a Wyoming businessman was conned out of nearly half a million dollars by a psychic who convinced him he was surrounded by evil. The psychic puts the fear of Satan into people who cross her path and has scammed hundreds of people across the US. She now faces charges of "grand larceny and fortune telling".

Results of anomalists study

Recent research by The Anomalist has unearthed staggering statistics about those who pursue the investigation of anomalous experience. Despite 63% reporting they would board a UFO and 57% would relish the opportunity to visit a fairy realm, 93% of respondents defined themselves as being sceptics. Cryptozoology and UFOs were anomalists' favoured topics of choice, with 24% stating these subjects to be of greatest interest to them, with interest in parapsychology coming in at just 11%.

Have you heard any news from the paranormal world you'd like to share with other members? Email us on assapnews@assap.org

THE ASSAP INSIDER



What's going on in your Association?

Pre-Book for Training Weekend 2008!

The Training Weekend is the big one; the event where it all happens. ASSAP's AAI training was revamped in 2007 to become a residential training weekend better able to prepare you for investigating ASSAP cases in the modern sphere of anomalous phenomena investigating.

In November 2008 we are going "up north", proving we are not a south-centric association. We've also listened to the calls for more than three months notice. As such you can pre-book now by ringing us or emailing training@assap.org

The TW will take place at Beverly Friary in Yorkshire on 22-23 November 2008. If you have trouble with transport get in touch, we may be able to help.



Oak House, Birmingham

Places Left on Training Investigation

There are still a very small number of places left at the ASSAP Training Investigation to take place at Oak House, Birmingham on Saturday 29th March at a subsidised cost of £20.

The Training Investigation is designed for those who have completed the Training Weekend to completed their AAI status, but any members are welcome.

Email chairman@assap.org or telephone us to book your place.

Changes to ASSAP Publications

The Executive have decided to change Anomaly to an annual journal of record. Rest assured that the annual Anomaly will be twice the size of the current Anomaly to ensure we are not producing any less research for your consumption!

This step will save a lot of money, which we will invest in increasing the number of pages of the ever-popular ASSAP News. You will notice this edition has 16 pages compared to the usual 12! We hope this step will improve the overall publication package you get for your membership fee.

ASSAP's Public Profile

ASSAP has always been a rather self-effacing association, shying away from the embarrassing excesses of the mass media.

Where other long-standing organisations have seen their profile and caseload diminish over recent years as the number of groups across the UK has exploded, ASSAP has seen a steady flow of cases. However we have not benefited from the recent upturn in interest in the paranormal.

The executive has decided to help raise the association's profile, albeit in a responsible way, so that more people know of ASSAP as a national organisation and a possible investigator of their case.

If anyone has any ideas about how to raise our profile please email chairman@assap.org



Caroline Pick receives her award at the AGM

Michael Bentine Shield Awarded

Each year the Michael Bentine Shield is awarded to the investigator who has produced the best ASSAP case report. The shield is awarded in honour of past ASSAP President, the late Michael Bentine.

The 2007 winner, as presented at the November 2008 Training Weekend at Beaumanor was Caroline Pick (above) for her set of linked reports (CP05 / CP05A / CP05B) on the investigation of haunting phenomena at the Talbot Inn, Leicester.

Also highly commended was Dave Taylor for his report (DT03) on an investigation of anomalous photographs taken at Wychbury Hill.

INSIDER: ASSAP in publication

Chairman Dave Wood takes a snapshot of ASSAP in publication. ASSAP is lucky enough to count various authors amongst its members and to have, over the years, inspired publications. Our reputation is enhanced by honourable mentions of our labours in various publication. This is a six-month snapshot of ASSAP in publication.



Project Albion

Project Albion is a long-running programme to document the geographic of anomalous phenomena, inspiring over a dozen published or self-published works over more than 20 years.

If you would like advice on publishing an Albion style project email research@assap.org

Haunted Swindon – March 2008

The next installment in the Albion saga to be served up is *Haunted Swindon: A Census of Hauntings*, by ASSAP affiliate group *Paranormal Site Investigators*. *Haunted Swindon* provides a critical slant on more than 100 hauntings in what is seen by some as a soulless modern borough. But in the Albion style, *Haunted Swindon* goes further by discussing 'ghost theory' and analysing a census of cases. Findings include that, in Swindon at least, haunting events are more likely to take place in the afternoon than overnight!

Haunted Swindon is being published by Breedon Publishing at the end of March 2008, and is available for discounted pre-order through amazon.co.uk
See also HauntedSwindon.com

Mysterious Mitcham – Available now online

Mysterious Mitcham is James Clark's follow-up to his 2002 *Strange Mitcham*. This flexible online work aims to update on an ongoing basis and presents various accounts that were left out of the original publication.

You can visit *Mysterious Mitcham* for free online at:
<http://www.clarkweb.co.uk/shadowtime/mysteriousmitcham.html>

Strange Stroud – Ongoing Project

Sevenside Centre for Fortean Research aims to self-publish a range of accounts from Stroud in Gloucestershire and the surrounding area.

For more about SCFR visit scfr.co.uk

Honourable Mentions

ASSAP's work is acknowledged in many non-affiliated paranormal books and ASSAP members have found themselves well placed to pen works. Examples in recent months have included:

Chambers Dictionary of the Unexplained

This towering work was released in October 2007 and was generally acclaimed for the authoritative nature expected from Chambers. Contributors included

ASSAP founder members Bob Rickard, Paul Devereux and Jenny Randles.

The book finds generous entries for various paranormal research organisations. ASSAP and the SPR are the only two UK organisations concerned with psychic phenomena that had entries.

21st Century Ghosts

Published in October 2007, *21st Century Ghosts* is a visually appealing presentation of modern-day hauntings with chapters written by various researchers. Chapter authors include Stuart Andrews, who now helps to run ASSAP affiliate group *Supernatural Investigations*, Dave Wood and Nicky Sewell of the ASSAP executive and affiliate group *Paranormal Site Investigators*, Andrew Homer of the Anomaly team and ASSAP President Lionel Fanthorpe. There are also honourable mentions for ASSAP, and for ASSAP Treasurer Wendy Milner.

Ghosts Caught on Film

Published in September 2007, this is an attractive presentation and analysis of various anomalous photographs by Dr Melvyn Willin of the Society for Psychical Research.

The book credits ASSAP's work into anomalous photography more than once, Notably Maurice Townsend's Recent Anomaly article on the Subject.



Mysteries and Secrets of Time by Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe

From September 2007, ASSAP President and First Lady Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe present a fascinating work on the more metaphysical side of the paranormal. Watch out for a review in the next edition of *Anomaly*.

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The world according to Lionel Fanthorpe



The Mysteries and Secrets of Dreams

The first mystery associated with dreams is to define them. Our definition would be:

A dream is an apparent experience during which the dreamer sees and hears events which seem real during the dream, but which subsequently turn out to be purely mental experiences independent of any physical environment. However, aetiological dreams can have a quasi-relationship with the dreamer's actual physical environment, when, for example, the dream phenomena coincide in some way with a genuine physical experience: for example, a dream of falling may coincide with – and be 'explained' by – a dreamer's fall from bed.

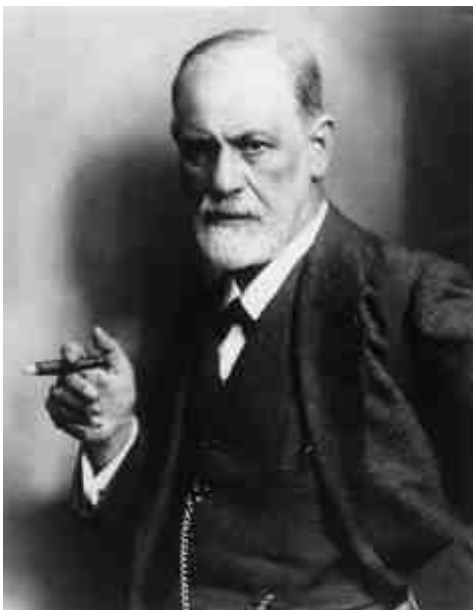
Dreams have a long and significant history. The biblical Jacob dreamed of a ladder connecting Heaven and Earth. Dream-coat Joseph experienced strangely prophetic dreams, and interpreted the dreams of others with remarkable accuracy. Lions-den Daniel was able not only to interpret dreams but to tell the dreamer what the dream had been about when that information had been kept secret. Joseph, husband of Mary, also experienced important, informative dreams.

Dreams seem to inspire writers: Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, and her then lover Percy Shelley (whom she later married) visited Byron in 1816, in his villa in Switzerland. Mary's nightmare of a man making a monster and bringing it to life was the foundation of her world famous *Frankenstein*. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Jekyll and Hyde* as the result of a dream, and Steven King attributes some of his best-known horror stories to dreams.

Inventors as well as writers are grateful for their dreams. In 1845 Elias Howe succeeded in producing a sewing machine after a vivid dream in which he was being pursued by spearmen whose spears had holes near the tips. He applied this to the design of his sewing machine needles and solved the problem!



Jacob's Dream of a ladder to Heaven. ©Mary Evans Picture Library



FREUD WITH CIGAR (1856 - 1939) Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis in 1921 aged 65
© Mary Evans / Sigmund Freud

The outstandingly brilliant Indian

mathematician, Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920), spent five years in Cambridge, where he did very significant work on elliptical functions and number theory. Despite the shortness of his life, Srinivasa proved over 3000 theorems. He told friends and colleagues at the University that the goddess Namakkal appeared to him in dreams and gave him the inspiration and knowledge that he needed to solve the problems on which he was working. One of his most memorable achievements was his formula for the infinite series of n .

No less a dream authority than Sigmund Freud described dreams as the "...royal road to the unconscious..." His fundamental theory was that all dreams are 'wish fulfilment' of one sort or another, and there is still more psychological treasure in Freud's deep mines than some of his more recent opponents give him credit for.

This seems to us to be a very promising area for ongoing ASSAP research. We could look together into Freudian theories, the time-work of J.W.Dunne in as far as it relates to dreams, the inspirational dreams of writers and inventors, and the neurological gateways that lead from normal waking consciousness into what Stevenson called "...the little theatre of the mind in which the lights never go out..."

©Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe Spring 2008

Paranormal

Forum

Dave Wood presents the case against paranormal 'fishing': the 'might as well' approach to bringing unproven methods and equipment into the paranormal investigation context.

Those who have been to ASSAP training over the last couple of years will remember the difference between 'fishing' and 'investigating'. Investigating cases focuses upon trying to find normal reasons for experiences that are reported as extraordinary; in other words the scientific and ethical approach to dealing with confused clients. 'Fishing', conversely, involves the use of an arbitrary range of equipment and methods – usually unproven – and depending on what is at hand at the time. The line between the unscientific reasoning, for example to 'detect ghosts' and the possibly scientific reasoning – to build a correlation between experiences/evidence and these tools and methods is uncomfortably close. Unfortunately the would-be rationale for the approach seems to be that we 'might as well give it a go since we're here' Oh dear.

The first problem of the fishing approach is one of usefulness. Do EMF meters test valid theories? Is there a case for Electronic Voice Phenomena? Can mediums contact the dead? These (and more) are all valid questions for research, and there has not been enough research on these subjects to date. There is great value in trying to isolate and test these variables in an experimental setting to try to assess whether these methods and tools are useful. However trying to 'gather evidence' in a 'real' haunting case using these methods is often scientifically and ethically suspect. Investigators feel they 'may as well have a go, as they are there' but any 'results' recorded will – unless strict controls are used – be anecdotal at best and therefore largely useless.

The second problem with fishing is concerned with these results. As the January 15th entry to the ASSAP Blog – crafted by ASSAP wise man Maurice Townsend – said: "If anything weird does happen it is more likely to be the result of all the extra techniques introduced (all of which have their own problems) rather than the haunting itself, which the researchers are supposed to be studying."

This might be interesting to an investigator collecting anecdotes over time but is ethically unacceptable on two levels.



"Have you seen any fish lately?" Image - ©Mary Evans Picture Library/Michael Buhler]

On the first level, 'fishers' are not helping a client by getting to the bottom of their problem as investigators would; and secondly they can often make cases worse by exacerbating the haunting using unproven and seriously flawed methods.

In other words using such tools and techniques in the first place is introducing an unproven variable into your research. For example recording an EVP 'voice' or photographing an orb might be seen as 'strengthening the case' for the haunting. However it is likely, in fact, to be a perfectly normal phenomena relating to the flaws of the tools and techniques - in this case radio frequency interference and photographing out of focus airborne particles, for example. This also raises serious ethical questions. Recording such 'evidence' based not on the case at hand, but on the flaws of unproven tools and techniques, could cause distress in clients. In this case a client that previously had reported just anomalous footsteps may now be convinced that their bedroom is haunted by orbs and that their kitchen contains the disembodied voices of several 'spirits'.

Until someone (or even you) publishes the research to support specific equipment and methods, keeping them well away from investigations and clients is the only scientific and ethical way to go!

**Do you have an item for
ASSAP News?**

**Email the editors at
assapnews@assap.org**

REVIEW

Auto Video Editor Pro Software

Auto Video Editor Pro software from Supermeters.

**Looked at closely by ASSAP member,
Steve Wills.**

The investigation is only half completed until you review the evidence. Video footage, personal experience, audio and data loggers, they all have to be checked.

I recently purchased one of the new generation of digital video cameras. A lovely little Sony with night-shot capability and a 60-gigabyte hard disk. How lovely not to have to change a tape every hour I thought to myself. Then it dawned on me, 41 hours of recording capability. Oh my, fancy having to watch that amount of footage when looking for anomalies. Painful enough watching a one-hour tape, now I may have to watch the equivalent of 41 tapes. There must be an easier way?

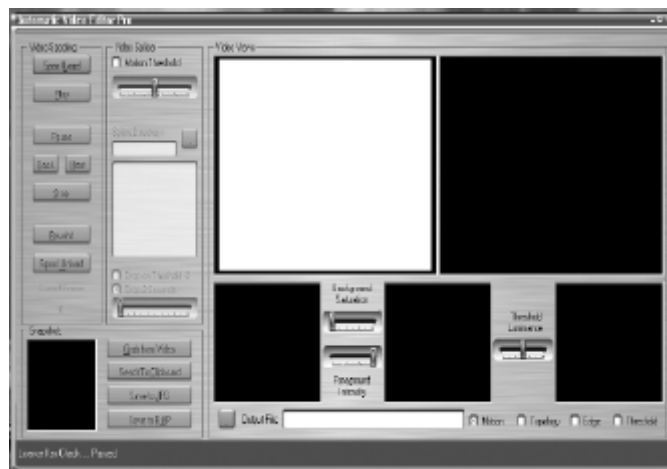
With a deep interest in everything to do with computers I decided to try and find a way to simplify the painstaking task of reviewing footage. One evening I trawled the Internet looking for a snazzy piece of software to alleviate the hours of staring at my screen. To my surprise I could only find one piece of software, which claimed to fit the bill. A program called Auto Editor Pro (AVE Pro) was going to be my saviour, or so it claimed.

I logged onto the website and immediately completed the transaction and eagerly waited for the postman to arrive in his shining armour on his trusty steed. Sure enough in just a few days the package arrived. Installation was a breeze and receiving the activation code after sending through the allocated pin numbers wasn't a chore.

OK, I'm ready to rock...

My first stumbling block was the format of the footage. My Sony compresses and saves its files into MPG2 format. AVE Pro will only accept AVI files. Back onto the Internet I went to find a free solution. AVI.net, a conversion program, was just the tool I needed, small enough to download and it is freeware.

With my first test file converted into the AVI format I made a start.



AVE Pro's friendly interface is pretty much self-explanatory, all of the buttons are clearly marked with sensible labels and position where you would expect to find them.

First you must spool the footage, just like loading up an old cine film onto your projector. Set the controls for motion detection sensitivity; select a location for stored footage of motion and press 'PLAY'.

The motion detection engine is extremely sensitive so I had to take care not to have the threshold for detection too low causing hundreds of motion files to be saved, thus defeating the object of the exercise.

The stored motion detection files use the frame number as a name, which is useful if you need to find that specific section on the original footage.

In all I completed 30 tests on the software, ten were conducted under the Windows Vista operating system and twenty under Windows XP Pro, here are my conclusions.

REVIEW

Auto Video Editor Pro Software

AVE Pro does not claim to run under Vista so no real conclusions could be made from this. The whole experience under Vista was a little slow with the program becoming unstable on several occasions. To be fair this is not the fault of the program but I would expect later revisions to support the new operating system.

AVE Pro performed to a much higher standard under the Windows XP format, faster and more stable, a pleasure to use.

I did however find a few glitches with the program the most frustrating being that certain parts do not work. Several tick boxes to allow monitoring of Topology, Edge and Threshold simply crashed the program as soon as checked. I can't see that I would personally ever use these functions but if it's there it should be working.

I mentioned earlier that the only video format supported is AVI; this is something else I would like to see expanded on to save time and hard disk space.

Marks out of 5?

Value	☆☆☆
Ease of use	☆☆☆☆
Stability	☆☆☆
Customer service	☆☆☆☆☆

Auto Video Editor Pro is available from Supermeters for £18.99.

Supermeters assures us that they are currently looking for an even better and more sustainable version of this software, as well as many other products for the serious investigator.

Visit www.supermeters.co.uk



Could *Paraviewer* help cut the workload when reviewing investigation footage? Image © PSI/ Dave Wood

Tested on moving subjects the software wasn't good. It picked up the movement and saved a file for each occasion but the number of files that were created when nothing was moving was unacceptable. The thirty-minute clip I used produced seventy files of which I only created an anomaly on six. This was much the same with my other twenty-nine test clips. I changed the motion sensitivity through the scale for each clip and found that either too much was reported or at the lower sensitivity too much was missed.

I guess this kind of footage is the worst to have to watch so I conducted several tests on a lock off trigger object in light and dark conditions using night-shot where needed. AVE Pro performed excellently in the dark and fairly well in daylight.

So to draw to a conclusion I would recommend AVE Pro as a tool for static lock off situations as its performance under these conditions was admirable. As far as catching a full-bodied apparition I guess we will have to keep watching the footage.



No. 4: Using cameras on paranormal investigations

This is a series of articles examining the basic questions of paranormal research. Though primarily aimed at those new to the subject, some old hands may also find something of interest.

Q: Why use cameras in paranormal research?

A: Many people own a camera and know how to use it. For that reason, it is probably the most widely used piece of equipment in paranormal research. Unfortunately, it is also often not used to best advantage. Nevertheless, it is an easy way to record events that our fallible human memories quickly forget. If we are really lucky, it may also allow us to record those elusive paranormal events we all seek, when they occur!

Q: What kind of camera is best in paranormal research: film or digital?

A: No question, digital photography is best! Some researchers prefer film purely to avoid orbs and other anomalies associated with digital cameras. However, it is easy to avoid taking orb photos with a digital camera and losing the advantages of digital is a big price to pay. Here is a list of just some of the advantages of digital over film:

- the ability to examine pictures straight away
- only print or keep the photos you want
- copy pictures between digital media without loss of quality
- no need for negatives, development or chemicals (and the delays they entail)
- EXIF data records your exposure settings and date and time
- change light sensitivity, resolution and colour balance easily, on camera
- colour reproduction is better
- higher resolution than 35mm film when using over about 6 megapixels

Also, all the new development by camera manufacturers is going into digital cameras, so film models will soon be left behind.

Q: There must be some disadvantages with digital cameras?

A: The only significant problem with digital photography, compared to film, is a loss of latitude. Latitude is the ability to show many shades of light and dark. It means that pictures lose detail in very dark, light or highly saturated areas. This problem sometimes produces claims of parts of orbs being behind objects in a photo. In reality, the detail of the orb in front of the object has simply been lost due the lack of latitude.

The solution to a lack of latitude is to slightly under- (with large light areas) or over-expose (with large dark areas) photos which may cause a problem. Many cameras will tell you if you have excessive 'highlight' or 'shadow' areas that could cause such problems.



This is an 'insectorod' – part insect, part flying rod. Note the rather unlikely 'wings', both on the same side, and fishy tail. For more info, see ASSAP website blog. Image © Maurice Townsend 2008



Q: How do you avoid orbs?

A: It is usually possible to avoid using flash if there are room lights on. Modern cameras are sensitive enough to avoid flash in most circumstances. Try setting an ISO higher.

Q: What is the best digital camera for paranormal research?

A: Always go for a camera with the highest specification that you can get hold of. Lower specification cameras often produce spurious anomalous photos simply because they are unable to cope in some situations. Some people actually prefer such models because they are 'better' at producing orbs!

Q: What camera settings are best for paranormal research?

A: The most important setting for all situations is resolution. Always select the highest quality / resolution your camera will handle. What is the point of owning an 8 megapixel camera and only using 1 megapixel pictures? The better the photo resolution, the easier it will be to enhance to pick out detail in anomalous photos. Modern cameras are highly automated. This can lead to photographic anomalies that are purely due to camera settings.

For instance, some 'night scene' programmes (or modes) allow a long exposure to be combined with a flash. This can lead to mysterious-looking light trails. It is best to select a mode or programme that does not use flash automatically (eg. 'Program' rather than 'Auto').

If you actually see something anomalous, take as many photos as possible. Try to take photos from several different angles. If possible, use zoom to get a close up of the anomaly or approach it if you can.

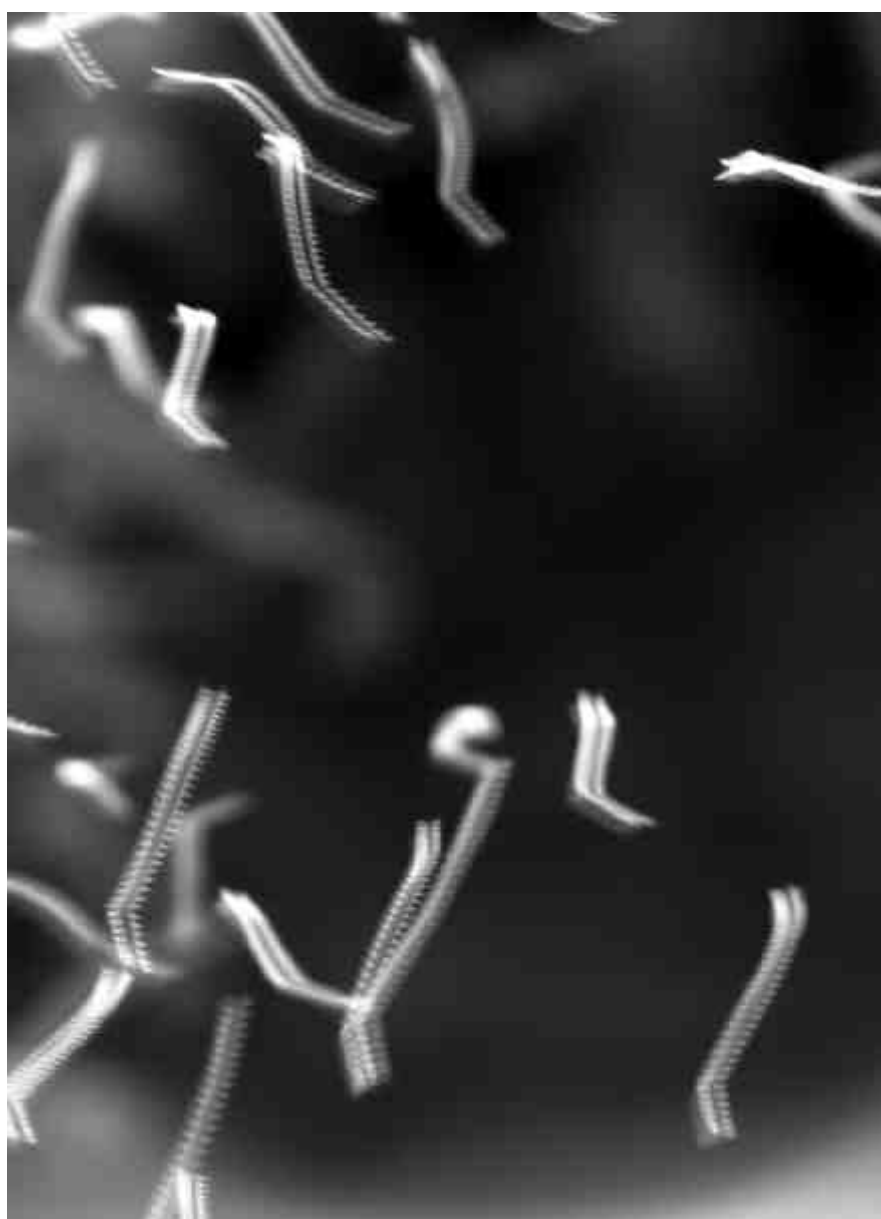


Image: Flying Rods © Maurice Townsend 2008

Further Information:

www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Digital%20camera.html

www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Taking%20paranormal%20photos.html

www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Orbs%20centre.html

theorbzone.com

F O C U S O N

ASSAP Training Weekend



ASSAP member Stephen Graham pens his first article for ASSAP News on his experiences at the Training Weekend held at Beaumanor Hall, Leicestershire, in November 2007.



Beaumanor Hall © Christine Matthews /Beaumanor Hall

What follows is an account of the experiences of my first training course studying to be a paranormal investigator with ASSAP - the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena. ASSAP can be found online and on facebook. The courses are run regularly throughout the year as a form of education and recruitment by what I found to be a very organised group of people. Places are limited, and the course, in Loughborough, was full with about 30 people this time, some staying at home over the weekend, others, like myself, staying onsite in simple accommodation.

Our course trainers were Dave Wood and Nicky Sewell who are respectively the chairman and secretary, although each team of people was led by a team leader and a recognisable face from ASSAP. Hospitality was the order of the day from the moment I stepped off the train until I went home - throughout the course we were kept well supplied in sandwiches and snacks, plus all the coffee and tea we could drink throughout the day, and a fantastic full english breakfast cooked by the staff on Sunday morning for the ones staying overnight in accommodation near the training room - incredible value!

The weather was extremely cold, but the welcome was warm. At 10pm it was time for introductions and getting to know each other - Dave and Nicky expertly managed this, and early on it was apparent that I was part of a professionally run, yet relaxed, seminar. Introductions were made: some people

were there to brush up their skills, as they were well known members (there was a whole team from Merseyside Anomalous Research Association), whilst other newer members were there to learn new skills. The course had people from all over the UK.

After introductions, it was straight into a tightly timetabled series of lectures, interspersed with interactive elements, such as Q&A sessions, to highlight what we had been told.

To begin with we covered the purpose of investigating: Thrill-seeking and ghost hunts are not on ASSAP's agenda, and many a Sky TV show got a thrashing for its abuse of the witnesses and its treatment of the paranormal phenomenon. Covering the next subject of ethics made it clear - never forget that few investigators see anything paranormal - you are reliant on witness testimony and be it ghost or alien, many witnesses are frightened and worried about their sanity. They may NOT share your enthusiasm for ghosts and aliens and the last thing they might want is to be told how exciting it all is and would they like the local press to report it - ultimately throughout the weekend it was drummed in that we are dealing with real people and real experiences, and we have a duty to respect privacy. Just because you think you are onto something doesn't mean you can trample roughshod over anyone - to be told that you cannot enter a property or interview a witness is the final answer, to be unquestioned: You have no special rights as an investigator and are not above the law.



ASSAP trainees hard at work at Beaumanor.

To be able to carry out an investigation though is an opportunity not to waste, and we were given plenty of advice - from case studies to ethical tests to see what we should do in certain situations. During investigations it was highlighted that we are there to identify natural causes - the unexplained remains



that, but natural explanations present themselves all the time. As an end to the first day it was good to keep our feet on the ground - the question of psychics being involved was brought up by investigators but well handled by the organisers ie test the psychics. Nothing should be taken for granted that would provide false results.

So ended an intense Saturday, but after a quick tour of the dormitory (for those staying overnight) it was off to the pub for a very nice meal and a chance to socialise with everyone - ranging from seasoned investigators involved with everything from ASSAP to SPR, to new members - one highlight being the organiser of a Viking re-enactment society regaling us with tales of his job as a film extra, including his stint on the Da Vinci Code and an up and coming 'viking' movie Faintheart! The night continued back at the accommodation, with tales of investigations and strange sightings. Trainees got to voice their interests and we learnt quite a bit about EVP that some investigators were interested in and had built their own test equipment. We also got to celebrate the birthday of one of the leaders - Wendy Milner - who made a fantastic breakfast the next day for us all!

We all got up in time for a 9pm start(!) to learn about finding cases - from studying the media to questioning friends and relatives. After all it seems very often a friend of a friend will come up with a ghostly tale, yet that story goes no further - it is the investigators job to follow up any lead - any case could prove much needed evidence, or require investigating, if only to settle the matter as a natural event and put the witnesses' minds at rest. We also learnt techniques for information gathering and equipment handling - ASSAP has a rule about scientific reporting and whilst this is difficult, due to the subject matter, it tries to avoid the pitfalls that plague the bad reporting that fills newspaper column inches and endless hours of TV. It was an insight into being rigorous and methodical in gaining information.



There was time to relax and socialise after a hard day's work

The afternoon was then spent with a mock case, as a basis for how to set up an investigation - which, if anything, reminded me of an elaborate Cluedo murder mystery, as the trainees got to interrogate the course and team leaders (acting in character) as witnesses in a haunted house: That this was so well done that it was a testament to the group's professionalism. On a tight timetable it was a thoroughly enjoyable case, as we studied the evidence, interviewed the witnesses and planned, as groups, a method of investigation covering all the facets we had learnt - from ethics to methodology.



A good time was had by all. Cheers!

Our written notes were handed in at the end of the course for marking - no cheap certificates were handed out to mark the end of the course - as the next step to qualification is to undertake a real investigation and provide a written report on it. Only when that is approved will you become an ASSAP investigator, with the rule that you provide reports at least every two years, or undergo new training, to keep the quality of their work at its best.

In conclusion I thoroughly recommend anyone to join ASSAP and take part in their coursework - I can hardly wait for the official investigation for ASSAP trainees in March, though thanks to MARA I hope to go on an earlier investigation in February and begin to act upon my lifelong interest in the paranormal by actually investigating and helping others to understand what they may have experienced. If you have experienced anything unusual then, as with so many things, the more people you can tell the better understanding you may gain.

I hope that the ASSAP courses, in their way, will help people to gain trust in what they believe and act upon it.

Stephen Graham

Spring 2008

See page 4 for details of the next ASSAP training course:
Training Investigation at Oak House,
Birmingham on 29th March

I N T E R V I E W



David Taylor

Matt Hicks interviews Parasearch's front man...



David Taylor

MH: Can you remember what first piqued your interest in the paranormal?

DT: Like a lot of people involved in this subject, my interest began as a child, not because of any paranormal experience unfortunately, but through a love of old black & white horror films and the ghost stories of M.R. James. Then there were television programmes like Arthur C Clarke's *Mysterious World* and Leonard Nimmo's *In Search*

of... Not to mention the BBC Christmas ghost stories. I then began to devour everything I could read about the subject - some of its good - most of it bad! Then in the early 1980s my father and uncle took over the running of a national UFO group. I used to sit in on committee meetings - it was great! I have fond memories of skywatching in Warminster in the early 1980s. You used to meet some fantastic people on top of Cradle Hill on a Saturday night - UFOlogists, conspiracy theorists, psychics, contactees, abductees and the just plain mad!

MH: Parasearch works a lot with non-member experts - is this an integral part of what you do?

DT: Definitely! The subject of psychical research is truly multidisciplinary, so having access to specialist consultants is very important. It's something we've been doing for years. We were fortunate to be able to call upon the expert photographic knowledge of people like the late Dr. Vernon Harrison in the past. Also amongst our consultants are well known researchers like Paul Devereux and Jeremy Harte. We have also been working with academics at Cambridge University into the historical origins of theories about apparitions. We are very fortunate in having a long standing excellent relationship with such organisations as the Society for Psychical Research, Scientific & Medical Network, Alister Hardy Society, The Ghost Club and of course ASSAP!

MH: Recently, parapsychology has faced some fierce criticism from prominent members of the scientific establishment. How would you defend the subject against the accusations of people like Robert Winston?

DT: Healthy scepticism plays an important part in science, and stimulates research and critical thinking. Healthy sceptics are open-minded and interested in evidence. By contrast, dogmatic sceptics are committed to the belief that "paranormal" phenomena are impossible, or at least so improbable as to merit no serious attention. For example in September 2006 Dr. Rupert Sheldrake came in for a lot of criticism at the BA Conference at the University of East Anglia from people like Lord Winston and Prof. Atkins for his research into telepathy. Quite why a fertility expert and a chemist should be qualified to rubbish scientific work in an area not their own is a concerning question. As the philosopher and psychologist William James said "A great many people think they are thinking when they are really rearranging their prejudices".

MH: You were involved heavily with the Wem Town Hall photograph. What's your opinion on the cause of that curious photo?

DT: Whatever your opinion of Wem, you have to agree it's a great photograph! It's now become part of modern ghost lore, so I am quite proud that we were the only group to carry out a full investigation of the image and the location. Opinion about the image is divided, you only have to look at the internet to see how much rubbish has been written about the photograph. The photographer, up until his death, was adamant that the photograph was genuine. Dr. Vernon Harrison who examined the image for us believed it showed a piece of burning wood which the brain interpreted as a human face. The Museum of Film & Photography at Bradford said it was a hoax. In 1996 we used all available technology to analyse the original image. At that point we had to say that the case remained unsolved. Today technology has moved on and we have been re-examining the image with some sophisticated image software, with some quite interesting results. Watch this space!

MH: You have a big conference planned for later in the year - tell us more

DT: We wanted to bring together experts in their field to present some truly interesting and new approaches to anomalous experience, while at the same time making it accessible to a general audience. We have teamed up with the Alister Hardy Society who are based at the University of Wales to hold a joint conference at the Guildhall in Worcester on Saturday 27th September. We have three speakers - Dr. Peter Fenwick, consultant neurophysiologist and expert on Near Death Experiences (NDE) will be talking about new approaches to NDEs. Dr. Mark Fox a philosopher who is on the Research Committee of the Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales will be talking about collective experiences of anomalous light phenomena and finally Professor Gwyn Hocking from Imperial College London will present her research into ESP, molecular structure and quantum physics.

Parasearch has been established for over twenty years now, has your approach to investigation changed much over that time?

Our approach today is certainly different than 22 years ago. Firstly we are very fortunate in having a great membership with a serious, scientific approach to the subject. We also have better equipment for a start and we are more concerned with the phenomenological/social anthropological/transpersonal approach. If psychical research is to progress beyond its current state of 'paranormal tourism' and gadgets ruling the day, then we have to take the subject into more diverse areas such as consciousness studies.

Parasearch and The Alister Hardy Society Oxford/Cotswold group present:

WORLDS APART WORLDS TOGETHER

Explorations in Science, Spirituality and Psychical Research
The Guildhall, Worcester, 27th September 2008

Speakers:

Dr Peter Fenwick Prof Gwyn Hocking Dr Mark Fox

Tickets £18.50 in advance, £20 on the door. Hurry - limited spaces!

For more details please see www.parasearch.co.uk

Or telephone 0776 1184837

SPOTLIGHT ON GROUPS

In the trenches with paranormal research



Featuring the Staffordshire Paranormal Study Group

The SPSG was formed in 2006 by a small group of ASSAP members based in Stoke on Trent. Having all been involved in paranormal study for years, Terri Settingington, Sean Meadon, Mel Tomkins and Matt Hicks decided the time was right to form their own group. Both Terri and Sean are ASSAP Approved Investigators, whilst Matt is a freelance writer on the paranormal who contributes to ASSAP News and a number of webzines and blogs.



Matt, Sean and Terri investigate.

The group endeavours to apply an enquiring, rational approach to reports of paranormal activity. They have investigated a number of cases in the region and further afield, in the process working with CN News, the BBC and a range of local magazines and newspapers. Recently, they have looked into a private domestic haunting that has produced some thought-provoking results on the psychological factors that drive witness reports, as well as the nature of apparent paranormal activity.

Current investigations include a Stoke location that has produced reports of apparitions and physical activity as well as some intriguing camera footage. The group are also in the process of establishing a longitudinal study at a well-known North Staffordshire location that should allow a detailed and productive assessment of a haunted location.

Although membership is by invitation only, the SPSG is always keen to hear from people who would like to work with us, whether that be prospective members, other groups or simply those with an odd report to tell.

www.spsg.org.uk
thespsg@yahoo.co.uk

ASSAP AFFILIATES

ANGLIA PARANORMAL INVESTIGATION SOCIETY (APIS)
Operates in the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire area. Contact Paul Keech at apismail@ntlworld.com or phone 01234 771 351 or visit www.apisteamspirit.co.uk

CHESTERFIELD PSYCHIC STUDY GROUP (CPSG)
Offers a programme of talks by invited speakers on the second Friday of each month at 7.15pm at the Community Centre, South Place, Chesterfield. Visit www.cpsg.co.uk or phone 01246 413217.

GHANON is a group covering Wirral, Cheshire and North Wales. Membership by invitation. Contact emailus@ghanon.org or visit www.ghanon.org or phone 0700 341 8495

LEICESTERSHIRE PARANORMAL ASSOCIATION (LPA)
Contact Ian and Vanessa Walker on info@leicsparanormal.tk or visit www.leicsparanormal.tk

LEICESTERSHIRE PARANORMAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (LPRA) Contact Caroline and Margaret Pick on lpramail@aol.co.uk or phone 07904 785 174

MELTON PARANORMAL RESEARCH SOCIETY (MPRS)
Based in Leicestershire. Contact Christine Hankey on 07745 398 569 or email meltonparaclub@aol.com

MIDLAND PARANORMAL INVESTIGATIONS operates throughout the Midlands. Check out www.midlandparanormal.co.uk or email mark@midlandparanormal.co.uk or phone 0121 603 7356

MERSEYSIDE ANOMALIES RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (MARA) Monthly meetings in Liverpool city centre. Contact tonyccles@yahoo.com or write to 18a Parkfield Road, Aigburth, Liverpool L17 8UJ or phone 0151 727 4057

THE MIDLANDS GHOST RESEARCH SOCIETY (TMGRS) Operates in the Coventry area. Visit www.tmgrs.co.uk or email Amanda and Martin at info@tmgrs.co.uk

OPEN MIND INVESTIGATIONS (OMI)
Operates in the Kent and Hampshire areas. Contact Cara via the website on www.omi-uk.org

PARA.SCIENCE Meet on the first working Monday of each month at Bebington Civic Centre on the Wirral. (8pm) Visit www.parascience.org.uk

PARANORMAL AWAKENING SCIENTIFIC STUDY ASSOCIATION (PASSA) Operates in the Midlands area. Contact Stefan on 0121 353 7622 (admin@navigatortm.com) or Cherill on 01543 685 913 (susan.penton1@btinternet.com) or visit www.paranormalawakening.com

PARANORMAL SITE INVESTIGATORS (PSI) operates in Wiltshire and surrounding area and produces e-newsletters and research journals. Contact Dave or Nicky through www.p-s-i.org.uk HauntedSwindon.com TheOrbZone.com or 0845 6521529.

PARASEARCH operates in Worcestershire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and the West Midlands. Visit www.parasearch.org.uk or phone 07761 184 837 or send an SAE to Parasearch, 15 Brier Mill Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 3HA.

PLYMOUTH ASSAP Operates in Plymouth, South Devon and South East Cornwall. Contact Lee at eustacetuttle@yahoo.co.uk

SPIRIT TEAM UK Operates in the Midlands, with meetings at Ashby-de-la-Zouch and Coventry. Contact Alan at enquiries@spiritteamuk.com or visit www.spiritteamuk.com

STAFFORDSHIRE PARANORMAL STUDY GROUP (SPSG)
Monthly meetings in Stoke on Trent. Contact Terri at thespsg@yahoo.co.uk or visit www.spsg.org.uk

SUPERNATURAL INVESTIGATIONS (UK) are based in Devon and Somerset but aim to investigate nationally. Currently their main interests lie in ghosts. Contact Stuart at stuart@supernaturalinvestigations.org.uk

TEMS Operates in the South East. Visit www.temsgroup.org.uk or email infoenquiry@temsgroup.org.uk or write to TEMS, 10 Effra Road, Wimbledon, London SW19 8PP

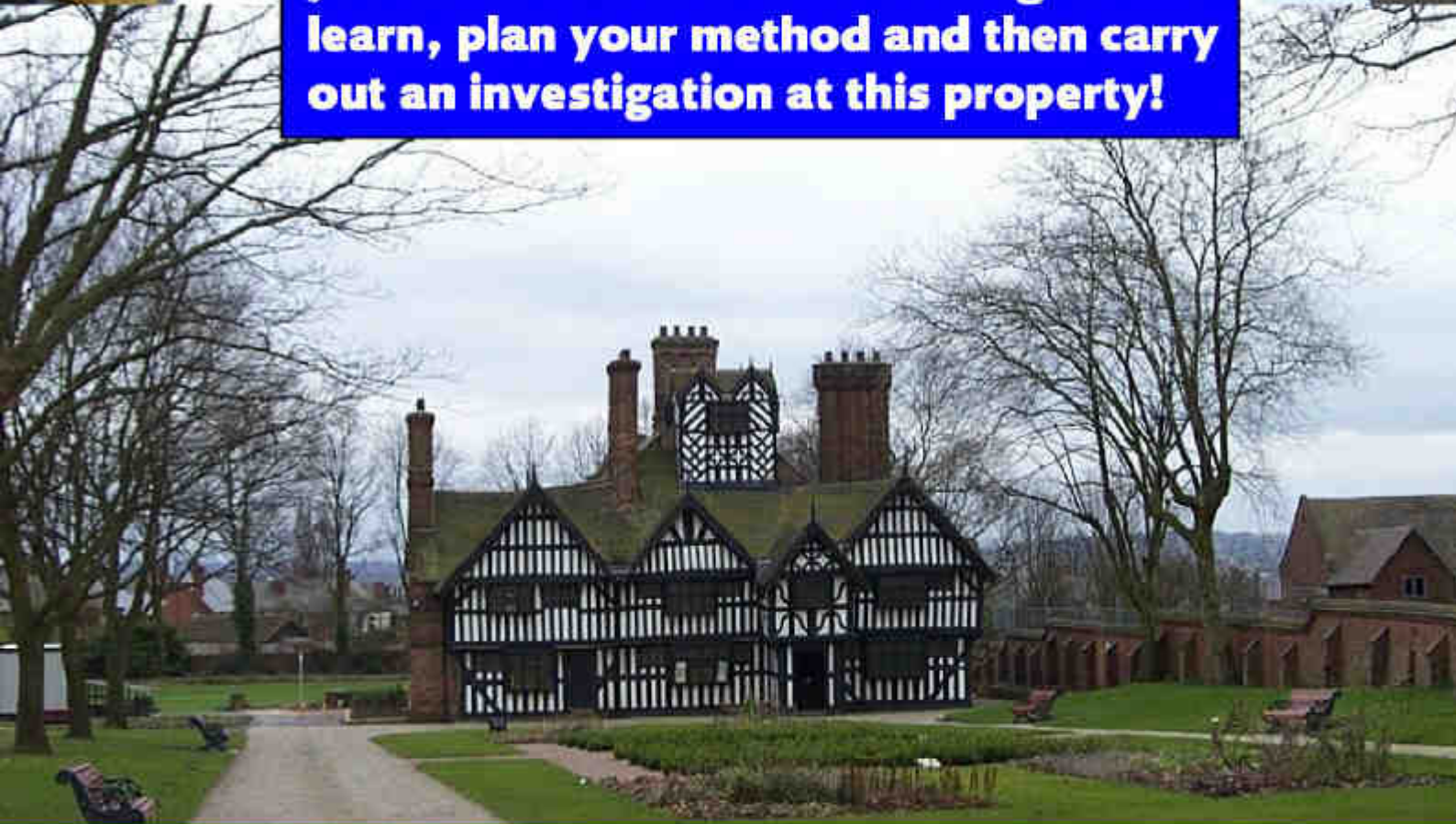
LIMITED SPACES

MARCH 29

ASSAP Training Investigation



Join us at Oak House in Birmingham to learn, plan your method and then carry out an investigation at this property!



Reserve your place now to avoid disappointment: see page 4