

NEWS

Issue 126 Spring 2009

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The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena was formed in 1981 to research and education about a wide range of paranormal phenomena, as well as preserving heritage. 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.

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Website Members' Area

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 assapchairman@assap.org so you can keep up to date!

The Executive

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ASSAP Affiliate Groups:

Groups provide incidental support for ASSAP's charitable objects by acting as forums for research. Should you wish to affiliate or start a group please contact assapgroups@assap.org

See opposite for details of groups in your area.

ASSAP AFFILIATE GROUPS

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 lpmail@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 meltonparacub@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: 0121 550 8874 / 07505 323443 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 (SI) are based in Devon and Somerset and Cornwall but also operate further afield, mainly focusing on hauntings. 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



Get Involved!



Do you want to help ASSAP by joining our Executive?

A recent review of activities has created several new volunteer posts. Members are invited to put their names forward for consideration by contact Chairman Dave on assapchairman@assap.org

The following new positions have been created:

- ☐ **Education Officer.** To create and deliver a wider ASSAP Education Programme. This does not include ASSAP's current training.
- ☐ **AAI Co-ordinator.** To act as a contact point for AAIs, to process AAI applications and produce the AAI Bulletin.
- ☐ **Events Officer.** To book, promote and administrate current and new events. This does not include delivering training.

The existing position of **ASSAP Company Secretary** is also available.

All positions are available to job-share. Executive members must be able to promote ASSAP's charitable objects, including the promotion of science at the expense of pseudo-science.

The position of National Investigations Co-ordinator has been abolished. The positions of Case Co-ordinator, Albion Officer, Case Quality Controller and AAI Assessor were also created and filled by current elected members.

ASSAP in the Public Eye

ASSAP Media Officer Carrie Searley has become a regular contributor to the new *Ghost Voices* popular magazine. Chairman Dave Wood continues his education column in the popular *Paranormal Magazine*. ASSAP has also been recently consulted by the Discovery Channel on the production of a more scientifically-focussed TV series and has been approached by another satellite channel in connection with producing a TV programme.

ASSAP is very much a members' organisation; we cannot survive without you as writers, contributors, researchers, investigators and supporters. Why not get involved in one of the following ways?

Attend Training/Become an AAI

We run training events twice a year. The Training Weekend is usually the first step for prospective AAIs (Approved Investigators) and the Training Investigation the second. Training is always advertised in these pages.

Become a Researcher

ASSAP has recently relaunched the Merlin Matrix, a research framework that provides ideas and protocols for individual researchers (or groups of researchers) to conduct their own ASSAP research in a supported way. Contact Hugh on assapresearch@assap.org

Research your own Area

ASSAP's Albion Project is a collective of individuals across the decades researching their own geographic area, to record, research and preserve heritage traditions. If you are interested in starting a project in your area contact assapalbion@assap.org

Write for ASSAP News

As well as our regular contributors columns ASSAP News accepts one-off or occasional contributions from any member.

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

Submission Guidelines: Please email, or use our postal address, providing around 400 words and at least one photograph per page.

Areas for Submission: 1) Focus, two pages on any broad subject area, for education of members, 2) Research, a page update on any research you have been conducting, 3) Forum, a page to air your views on an area of research, respond to or start a debate, 4) Albion, two pages about the anomalous traditions of your local area, 5) your own training, education and events (no word guidelines). Submission Deadlines: Submission deadlines are the end of April, July, October and January of each year.

Write for our Research Journal, Anomaly

If you have a long research article, an experimental write-up, case summary or book review please submit to our annual Research Journal, Anomaly, by the end of September. Editors Dave and Matt can be contacted on assapjournal@assap.org

Tell us about a case

Do you know about an anomalous case? Get in touch with us on assapinvestigations@assap.org

Training Investigation 2009



Why should you go to TI09?

The Training Weekend is ideal for anyone wishing to complete their application to become an Approved ASSAP Investigator (AAI). For anyone wishing to renew their AAI status the following year, attending the Training Investigation will qualify you for renewal.

TI09 is also a great opportunity for anyone wishing to refresh their skills, or even kick start their investigating career.

What can you expect?

The training will focus on the practical skills you need to design a scientific and ethical investigation, picking up from where the Training Weekends leave off. This includes practical opportunities to interview witnesses

and actually design the investigation you will be conducting that evening!

Where? Beverley Friary, East Yorkshire

When? Saturday 14th March, 2009: 12 noon to 12 midnight

How much? £25

What is included? Several training sessions, an investigation at the Friary and a place to sleep on the Saturday night!

By when? Bookings do not close until 28th February. However these events are very popular and the number of places has been limited to 20 so we strongly recommend you book before the end of December.

Who should come to TI09?

The Training Investigation is open to all ASSAP members. It is particularly recommended for those who have attended a Training Weekend.

How to Book?

Contact Nicky on assaptraining@assap.org

There is a lot of excitement about this event – the delegates at the Training Weekend were having experiences during training.



Training weekend 2008

TRAINING IN THE SOUTH

Can you secure a good location for the next Training Weekend or Training Investigation in the south of the country? If so please contact Nicky on assaptraining@assap.org

Muncaster Castle / UK-Skeptics conference 2009

-Things that go bump in the brain- Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Paranormal and Anomalous Experiences

The UK-Skeptics conference 2009 will take place at Muncaster Castle in Cumbria during the weekend 18th - 20th September. Muncaster Castle is a fabulous location on the west coast where a lot of research has been done into haunting experiences and so serves as an excellent backdrop for a conference examining the topics of paranormal and anomalous experiences.

Muncaster Castle in Cumbria

The aim of the conference is to take a balanced view of parapsychological issues and we will be getting talks from all perspectives (not only from skeptics) in the hope of increasing understanding of the issues and generating healthy debate in a friendly manner with those on all sides of the Paranormal debate.

In order to achieve this, an excellent selection of internationally renowned speakers from several disciplines including neuroscience, social psychology, parapsychology, cinema studies and sociology have been invited to give their perspectives on anomalous experience.



Speakers and topics include:

Chris French...	The Psychology of Anomalous Experiences.
Jason Braithwaite...	The Haunted Brain: Towards a Cognitive Neuroscience of Anomalous Cognition.
Nick Pope...	The Ministry of Defence X-files.
David Wilde...	Interpreting the anomalous: finding meaning in out-of-body and near-death experiences.
Karen Douglas...	The social psychology of conspiracy beliefs.
Chris Roe...	Psi as Unconscious: A review of some recent research developments in parapsychology.
Xavier Mendik...	The Lure of the Dark side: Sex, death and the paranormal in cult movies.
Emma Louise Rhodes...	A Matter of Life and Death: A Sceptical Look at Spiritualism.
Christine Mohr...	A Neuroscientist looks at the Paranormal.
John Wallis...	Between the Worlds: Mediumship in the 21st Century.

As is clear from the location chosen and the invited speakers, we have decided to make the conference a quality event rather than go for minimum cost; however, the price per head will still only be £65 as an Early-Bird booking discount (£75 if booked after July 1st).

This price includes, access to both days of the conference (10 talks, 5 per-day); access to the Friday night welcoming wine reception (meet the speakers) to be held in the castle; tea, coffee and biscuits each morning and afternoon session; a two course hot fork buffet style lunch on Saturday and Sunday, full access to the castle and grounds for the duration of the conference (note castle is open Friday and Sunday - grounds open all the time).

In addition, an optional 3-course dinner for speakers and delegates is available on Saturday evening in the castle (priced separately £45 per-head).

Numbers will be limited and allocated on a first come first served basis...so early booking is advised!

For more information about the conference, venue and booking forms, please go to:

<http://www.muncaster.co.uk/muncaster-castle-paranormal-conference> Alternatively, telephone 01229 717614 for a booking pack, or write to: Muncaster Castle, Ravenglass, Cumbria CA18

Focus On is a series of education articles covering the wide range of anomalous phenomena ASSAP has researched. If you would like to contribute a piece please contact us first - news@assap.org

Vampires and Vampirism



Nosferatu – one of the first portrayals of a vampire on screen.

Source: Still from the 1922 movie 'Nosferatu' - Wikimedia Commons

The term 'vampire' first appeared in the Oxford English Dictionary in the early eighteenth century, but under different guises the concept has much older origins.

Today vampires are considered to be fictional monsters. The modern conception of vampires as tall, pale figures - often urbane and charismatic - seems to derive from Polidori's novel *The Vampyre*; although many common clichés were, of course, popularised in Stoker's *Dracula*. Early western accounts of vampires often depicted less attractive figures.

Cross-Cultural Vampires

Vampires are fairly well-known for having their roots in many cultures across time. Although not specifically linked with vampires as we know them, many cultures featured blood-drinking demons. Examples from ancient times include the Greeks, Romans, Persians and Babylonians. Vampire-like monsters have sustained across the folklore of Europe, the Americas, Africa and

Asia for centuries. Much modern folklore and Western understanding comes from the pervasiveness of Eastern European ideas. There are few common features that unite representations of vampires across cultures and time.

Their physical appearance varies from the divine to the monstrous, some drink blood while others energy. Creation of vampires varies from deliberate creation by another vampire, some by poor decisions made in life and others by the circumstances and actions surrounding the death (everything from a cat jumping over the corpse, to not placing a coin in the mouth). Methods of protection also vary, from the Chinese tactic of leading a vampire to a sack of rice (where it would have to count every grain), Holy Relics and mirrors on the door.

Media Portrayals of Vampires

Mass media interpretations of vampires are legion and have given rise to much new folkloric knowledge in itself. Most traditional accounts of vampires do not mention sunlight as being lethal, but is now very much incorporated into common perception.

Most modern portrayals of vampires have maintained the image of the charismatic, gentleman predator popularised in early fiction. However the first popular, big screen treatment of the genre was the 1922 Murnau picture *Nosferatu*, in which the vampire was depicted as a stooped, monstrous human figure. A number of portrayals have followed the grotesque image, temporarily or otherwise, including Salem's Lot, Buffy and Blade.

Whilst the charming figure was exemplified by the dozens of incarnations of Dracula, the dated figure was updated to appeal to modern audiences in, for example, *Lost Boys* and the *Twilight* series.

Although long linked to gothic culture, vampires inspired the existing modern goth sub-cultures in the portrayal of the tortured and tormented souls as seen in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*.

'Real Vampires'

Sceptics suggest that it is this propensity to continuously update to become relevant to young audiences that has inspired individuals to self-define as 'vampires'. A brief look through the google lens returns a number of 'real vampire' networks, support groups and even education sites.

Various websites advise of ways to find other vampires, engage in meet-ups, spotting and approaching vampires, tips for parents of vampires and 'coming out' as a vampire. The quantity of websites, across the world, suggests that there is quite a community of people who genuinely believe they are vampires.

Usefully, several websites provide a 'checklist' of criteria to fulfil in order to be sure you are a vampire. Examples include: being pale, preferring to be up at night, mood swings, parental separation, being talented, fast healing, quick reflexes, wanderlust and an affinity with odd people. Some 'vampires' claim their defining characteristic is a craving to drink blood, others feel that is too clichéd and feel there are other subtle indicators. Others still do not feel they are innately vampiric, but engage in the seemingly widespread practice of vampirism as a fetish (sexual or otherwise).

Very few 'real vampires' in evidence (at least online) claim to be overtly supernatural or immortal; they feel they are just marked out by certain characteristics. A seemingly small number of individuals do seem to believe there are real – that is to say, supernatural and immortal – vampires at large.

Sceptics suggest that a high proportion of 'real vampires' are teenagers attempting to find an alternative identity, variously inspired by role-playing games, literature, certain sub-cultures and romantic film and television portrayals.

Medical Vampirism

Others suggest that vampirism has been inspired by various medical conditions in history and that, similarly, people with certain conditions (who also feel the need) are liable to identify these characteristics as 'vampiric' and go on to self-define as a 'vampire', and adopting the lifestyle to support the idea.

Conditions include various forms of photosensitivity (aversion to light) and the so-called Renfield syndrome (or clinical vampirism, an obsessions with drinking blood) which is somewhat disputed.

Other disorders may have contributed to mass hysteria about vampires in less enlightened times, including anaemia (symptoms include pale skin and weakness – also common symptoms of a 'vampire attack'), sleep paralysis (that can lead to hallucinations, sometimes said to account for ghosts and demon experiences, too) and porphyria. Porphyria was associated with photosensitivity, aversion to garlic and a desire for blood. The association has been widely discredited due to the low prevalence of photosensitivity in sufferers along with the lack of historical association between vampires and the harmful effects of sunlight, whilst the desire for blood aspect of the condition has been largely disproven; sufferers of the disease have complained of the misinformation relating to the condition and the stigma attached to them



Highgate Cemetery – the site of one of the most famous modern vampire sightings. Picture: Wikimedia Commons. Licensed for public use.

Vampire Hunting

The mass hysteria in eighteenth century Eastern Europe led to a superstitious rural population claiming vampire sightings over a generation, and included several apparent cases of desecration of graves and staking of corpses. Authorities ruled that premature burial and rabies were the cause.

The alleged sighting of a vampire in Highgate Cemetery, London, led to a mass vampire hunt in March 1970. The theories behind the case and their passing into folklore have led to problems on site to this day.

In 2007, people describing themselves as 'vampire hunters' took preventative action in staking former Yugoslavian President Milosevic in order to prevent him returning as a vampire. Some have suspected this to be a political PR move!

There are a small number of societies at large today that claim that vampires, as supernatural entities, do exist and are pledged to find them.



Former Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic's grave was attacked by vampire hunters. Picture: Wikimedia Commons. Licensed for public use.

Conclusion

The story of vampirism seems similar to that of many areas of anomaly research. Ideas arise from folklore, inspired by misinterpretation and reflecting of human anxiety. The media takes hold of an issue and the human propensity to misattribute and misunderstand does the rest.



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

Number 8: Orbs and the paranormal

Q: What is an orb?

A: An orb is a circular photographic anomaly, usually white or grey and often translucent. There is no evidence that they are spherical, as the name implies, which is where a lot of confusion starts. All the available evidence (including a lot collected by ASSAP which has studied them in detail) suggests that orbs are out of focus bits of dust or insects caught in the flash of a camera. Virtually no serious paranormal researchers think orbs are paranormal.

Q: If no paranormal researchers take them seriously, why study them?

A: The general public still thinks they are paranormal, probably mainly due to the ghost hunting reality TV shows. ASSAP receives many emails asking if a photo contains an orb or is it just dust! In addition, many of those who don't think orbs are paranormal are a little vague about what causes them. So they may say it's flare or dust on the lens. The problem with such incorrect explanations is that when people compensate for these supposed causes of orbs, the orbs don't go away! This leads people to carry on thinking orbs are really paranormal.

Q: So what's the real cause of orbs?

A: Technical photographers and camera manufacturers agree that orbs are 'circles of confusion', a rather obscure feature of photographic optics. This idea has been developed into the 'orb zone theory' by ASSAP. There is an area of space, generally within a few centimetres in front of the camera lens, called the 'orb zone'. It is the area where dust or insects are too close to the lens to be in focus but show up because they are strongly illuminated by the flash. When objects are out of focus, their highlights (the bits that reflect most light) expand from points to circles (orbs). You can often see these 'circles of confusion' in outdoor shots of brightly lit objects at night on TV

programmes. In most digital cameras, the orb zone is much closer in and larger than for film cameras. That is why digital cameras, particularly the compact models, are so much more susceptible to orbs. Outside the orb zone, dust is either too small to be photographed or not bright enough to show up.

Q: Haven't some people seen orbs with the naked eye?

A: People have reported seeing small lights floating around in haunted houses for decades, long before orbs appeared. These lights have various names, which is why they sometimes get confused with orbs. It has been suggested that we adopt the name ALPs – Anomalous Light Phenomena - to differentiate them from orbs. ALPs could potentially be paranormal and interesting, unlike orbs. It is possible that the orb phenomenon is causing these ALPs to be under-reported.

Q: So why do some people still think orbs are paranormal?

A: It's usually either the context of the orbs or the way they look. Orbs have been noticed in photos taken in haunted locations, for instance but, in fact, they appear in photos taken anywhere. Also, research has shown that they are no more common in haunted rooms of buildings than in non-haunted ones. Odd shaped or coloured orbs are also sometimes considered paranormal though they, too, can be explained by the orb zone theory.





Q: Some people say most orbs are dust just a few are really paranormal.

A: The problem is that there is no general agreement about which orbs are supposed to be paranormal. Some say large bright orbs are paranormal, others that coloured ones or ones with tails are. ASSAP has done research into all these different variations and found they can all be explained by the orb zone theory. There are specific reasons for each variation but they are all still dust or insects. For instance, large bright orbs are generally caused by small insects which reflect light better. Coloured orbs often get their unusual hue from the way 'auto white balance' works in digital cameras. Orbs with tails are caused by falling raindrops, though they look as though they are flying upwards!

Q: What about orbs behind objects in photos?

A: It can appear like that but in reality the orb is still in front. However, you can't see the translucent orb in front because it is blending into the strongly coloured

background. It's because digital cameras have lower 'latitude' than film which means they lose detail in particularly dark, light or strongly coloured objects. Anything faint and wispy in front, like an orb, will simply disappear, making it look as though it is behind.

Q: I've got lots more questions on orbs.

A: Try:

www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Paranormal%20orbs.html

and the links below where many more questions are asked.

Further information:

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Orbs%20centre.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Orb%20Zone%20Theory.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/htmlfiles/Orbs%20gallery.html>

www.TheOrbZone.com

PhD Opportunities at Lund University

The Centre for Research on Consciousness and Anomalous Psychology (CERCAP) at Lund University in Sweden is seeking applications from bright graduates for their doctoral programme in psychology (including altered states and parapsychology) under the direction of Professor Etzel Cardeña.

Lund University ranks as one of the world's top 100 universities and free tuition and possibly maintenance costs are available to postgraduate

students on a competitive basis. Swedish language is not required. If you have an academic background in psychology and are interested in finding out more, further details about the CERCAP research programme and an application form are available online at : **www.parapsych.org/lund.html** .



The deadline is **April 15th 2009** so don't delay!



The Mysterious

Murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn in Polstead in Suffolk - and the Equally Mysterious Dream that led to her Killer's Arrest.

The beautiful, unspoilt, agricultural village of Polstead in Suffolk, is surrounded by historic fields and meadows. It lies to the south of Hadleigh, just north of Stoke by Nayland. It can easily be approached through Boxford on the A1071. In

the early 19th century, farmer William Corder (nicknamed 'Foxy') killed Maria Marten and buried her body under the floor of the Red Barn on his farm. Maria's 'mother' claimed that she

had had recurring dreams of the murder. The barn floor was duly excavated and Maria's body was found there. Corder was traced to London, where he had married a young school-teacher and started a school. He was arrested, tried and eventually hanged for Maria's murder. The ASSAP type mystery in this story

hinges on the account of the persistently recurring dream that led to Corder's arrest. *But was there ever such a dream?* Objective, psycho-social analysis might suggest *another* explanation.

Our detailed examination of the case produced some interesting facts. In

the 19th century, the popular, melodramatic version of the story had made Maria out to be an innocent young country girl, seduced by William "Foxy" Corder, a selfish, wealthy farmer, and an experienced man of the world who supposedly took advantage of her youthful innocence.

Maria was actually older than Corder and had already given birth to two illegitimate children – including one who had been fathered by Corder's now deceased elder brother. Maria seems to have pursued William rather than the other way round, a pursuit that led to the relationship that ended in her violent death.



The house in Polstead and the village pond where Corder's elder brother died



Her 'mother' (who allegedly had the mysterious recurring dreams) was actually Maria's *young step-mother*; not much older than Maria, and many years younger than Maria's father.

Was there a real ASSAP type psychic dream mystery here, or was it all a sordid fabrication by Maria's step-mother? One theory suggests that she, herself, was already having a relationship with Corder and was planning to marry the wealthy young farmer as soon as her old husband (the village mole-catcher) died. Was she even planning to speed the course of nature in that area?

According to this theory, she had inadvertently witnessed Maria's death and the subsequent barn floor concealment of the body. She then told Corder that she would keep quiet if he promised to marry her as soon as she was widowed. Maria was a sturdy, country girl – stronger than the slightly built and scholarly Corder – and he had shot her in

self defence when they had quarrelled and fought over the date of their wedding.

According to this version, it appears that Maria had become angry and attacked him during their meeting in the Red Barn.

When Mrs Marten discovered that Corder (who disliked farming and wanted an academic life instead) had gone to London and married a young teacher there – in spite of his deal with her – she wanted revenge. But how could she accuse

him of Maria's murder without admitting to concealing her knowledge of the crime? (Making her legally an accessory after the fact.) In a superstitious age, a recurring dream attracted a lot of attention. She saw it as the ideal way to get Corder arrested without becoming involved as a witness herself. The persistently reiterated account of the dream led to the discovery of Maria's body... and from there the law took its course.

All pictures and text © Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe
February 14th 2009

The Merlin Matrix

Great promise for ASSAP's

Research Effort

by Research Officer Hugh Pincott

Anomalous photography, survival of body death, the new house effect, and ever-popular Project Albion were among members' top choices in the recent research competition designed to elicit the direction of ASSAP's future research. 21 % of our membership responded, and 53 people volunteered to take part in one or more modules/projects of the Merlin Matrix (totalling 135 specific offers) - an all-time record.



Spot the anomaly!

The two top favourites were (a) to simulate how some ghost photos may be taken; and (b) to obtain evidence for the survival of bodily death, using mediumship, dreams, cipher tests and other techniques.

Joint second in the poll were the new house effect and Project Albion. The former is an excellent example of the xenonormal; instances where phenomena may appear paranormal, but after investigation have natural but unusual causes.

PROJECT

Albion



Project Albion is the long-running series of comprehensive booklets or collections of reported paranormal events in certain districts, together with their associated history and mythology.

High on the list were projects designed to take your own orb or UFO photos, and also prominent were the electronic voice phenomenon and table tilting, followed by sensitives and their significance.



The Research Department will be busy in the next few months matching task with talent, and we hope to engage the efforts of everyone who has volunteered.

Prize Draw Winners!

Winner of the £100 prize was David Aston ("an anomalous event in itself!", he reports). Cheques for £50 were received by Vicky Knowles, Anthea Holland and Ian Stevenson, while Michael Ferrier and Dennis Bury were awarded free annual memberships.

PROFIT-MAKING PARANORMAL GROUPS

ASSAP Chairman Dave Wood looks at the popular backlash against those companies and groups making a profit from 'paranormal eventing'.

There has been an increasing number of 'paranormal experience' companies established over the last decade. These 'nights' will typically involve a 'vigil' at a 'haunted' location seen on a popular TV programme. As the number of companies and events increases the costs of hiring such locations inevitably increase. This price increase seems to be a major source of irritation for many paranormal groups: seeing the cost of 'investigating' their favourite TV locations soaring year on year.

I find myself going against the trend of campaign groups, informal collectives and associations in not objecting to this. I should make clear at this point that as my involvement in the paranormal is restricted to trusteeship of two charities, ASSAP and PSI, it would be illegal for me personally to make a profit from any activities.

Surveying the reasons those who are against profit-making cite, their arguments tend to be pragmatic rather than principled. Few people state there is anything morally wrong with venues levying a fee for events, or even for others making profit. After all, the long-standing traditions of profit-making 'ghost walks' and 'ghost books' is still very much alive and well. The arguments against seem mainly to revolve around the increasing costs of venue fees for not-for-profit groups.

Investigators will frequently tell me they have had to stop investigating because of exorbitant fees (sometimes up to £1000 a night), and that 'serious research' is not possible because of these market forces.

The main problem with this line of argument is the assumption that the *only* place that research (or even

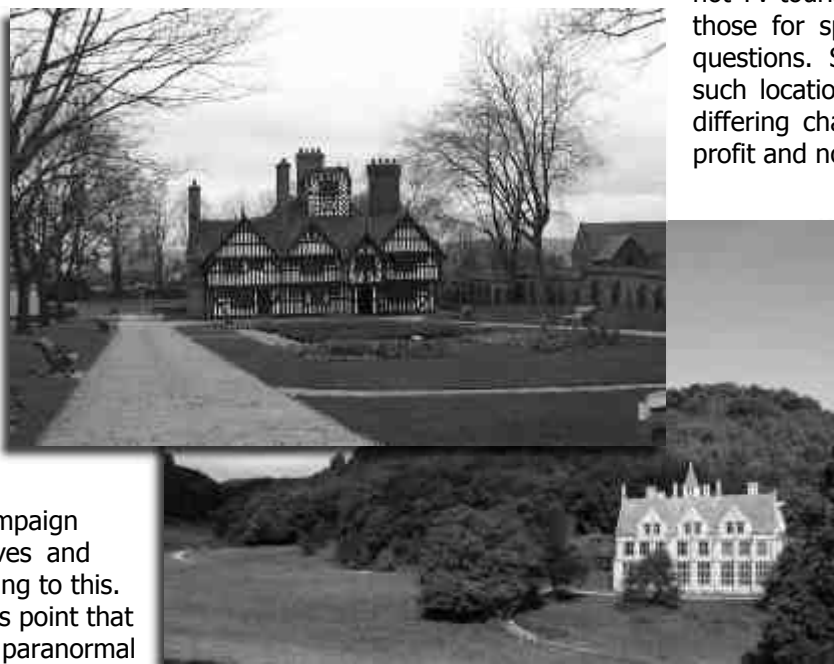
the *best* place for research to take place) is at a tourist location 'investigated' by TV entertainment shows. It might be easier to book a tourism location well-used to investigators – none of that pesky witness interviewing and setting up operation and ethics plans – but do these locations have any research value? Investigating a fresh location with access to eyewitnesses is both free and scientifically useful; relying on charging locations that see investigations every weekend may be easy and fun, but the research value is very low indeed.

The vast majority of locations I myself investigate are not TV tourist spots, we save those for specific research questions. Some people claim such locations should have differing charging rates for profit and non-profit groups, somehow thinking that these locations owe paranormal groups a living. On the rare occasions I find it necessary to investigate a TV location there is a specific, strong research rationale. My experience is that where one presents a TV location with a

serious research brief they are almost always willing to half (if not waiver) the usual fee.

There is, surprisingly, a little discussed ethical benefit to charging companies and their public nights. The more thrill-seekers book tickets to such events in a controlled, fun environment the less likely they are to try to set up their own 'group' and cause ethical havoc in their local pub.

In conclusion, fee-charging TV locations typically do not have the research value some think they do; and profit-making groups actually have a place in the field, even if only as an ethical safety-valve. My best advice is to forget the paranormal tourism spots, and return to researching fresh locations.



Dr Wendy Cousins Interviews JOHN JACKSON

John Jackson is a founder and now director of UK-Skeptics, a not-for-profit educational organisation that aims to promote science, reason and critical thinking. With over 1,300 users and 100 forum posts per day UK-Skeptics is the most popular skeptical website on these islands. Based in the far North of England, John is primarily a businessman, who has run his own successful company for the last 12 years, however his use of skepticism, primarily in business, has led to an interest in psychology and he is now completing an honours degree in the subject.

So why did you set up the UK-Skeptics website?

Back in 2005 we decided that there wasn't really much of an internet presence in the UK for skeptics, just about everything seems to be in the USA, so our initial goal was just to provide that presence and hopefully develop from there. Fortunately it worked and today we have a very busy web site and a vibrant forum. We are now actually redeveloping the main website into an academic resource and the more everyday content is being moved onto a content management system. 2009 will see the first UK-Skeptics public event take place when we hold our conference, and this will be the first of many events to come. We're still a small organisation but we are slowly but surely moving in the right direction.

Some paranormal researchers like Rupert Sheldrake have been very critical of what they call "Pseudoskepticism", what do you think real skepticism is?

Skepticism is usually the opposite of what people think it is! It's often thought of as 'disbelief' and sometimes 'denial', whereas in reality it's a method of examining claims using critical thinking and scientific principles. Regarding paranormal claims, skepticism equates with the scientific method and conclusions drawn depend very much upon the evidence presented. Where science is the whole process of investigation from observation, hypothesis formation, experimentation, etc., skepticism is the critical evaluation in the process: the part where we scrutinise the evidence and try to form a justifiable conclusion or theory that the evidence can support. Science would be of little more use than divine revelation or personal insight in discovering knowledge without it incorporating skepticism as a filter to eliminate bad ideas or erroneous conclusions.

Parapsychological research is usually defined along the lines of being the *scientific* study of paranormal (parapsychological, anomalous) experiences. In this sense, parapsychology should not be at odds with scepticism. As I've explained, skepticism is required to act as a necessary filter in the scientific method. In parapsychology, not one single claim of PSI is beyond dispute, there are problems in replicating results, and many parapsychologists do accept this; however, there are some parapsychologists who believe that PSI is authenticated, beyond all reasonable doubt and who do research to *prove* PSI rather than to explain anomalous experience (of which PSI is one explanation). These parapsychologists are the ones who cry 'pseudoskeptic' whenever someone doesn't agree with their own conclusions. It's easy to dichotomise researchers into gullible believers and closed-minded skeptics, but this is all nothing more than futile ad-hominem argumentation.

What's your attitude towards paranormal research?

Anomalous experiences occur to people all of the time, of that there is no doubt. So for that very reason alone they are worth researching. However, as a skeptic, I advocate the scientific investigation of anomalous experience whereby paranormal explanations are not assumed. For example, in researching a haunting report, normal explanations should be sought first rather than attempts being made to contact a spirit!

What are the biggest challenges facing organised skepticism?

Organising skeptics! Skeptics often state their aims as being things like: promoting science, reason, and critical thinking; and opposing things like: pseudoscience, scams, psychic charlatanism, and the excessive claims from alternative medicine. These are all laudable aims but they cannot be achieved without proper organisation. Unfortunately, organising skeptics is like herding

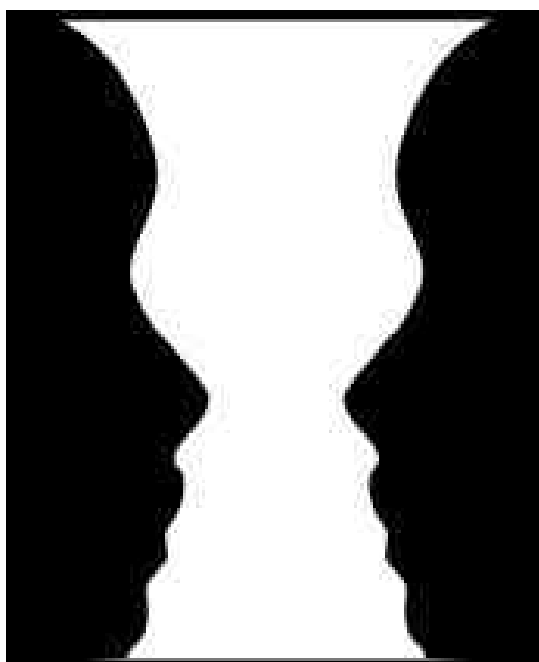
cats. So the biggest challenge we have here in the UK is actually organising ourselves into an effective body of centralised expertise that can pull together and actually attempt to tackle those aims as opposed to individual action like blogging, ad-hoc 'investigations' of alleged psychics' claims and other ineffectual measures.

Finally, I have to ask, why the 'K' in Skeptic?

Skepticism is international and when everyone else uses the K, including the Australians and Canadians who otherwise use British spellings (I think), then it looks silly and rather parochial to insist on using C. So, I prefer the international usage as although we're UK based, our publications are for everyone.

Website Information:

UK-Skeptics are online at www.skeptics.org.uk





Things to do in



By Dr Wendy Cousins



Dublin

when you're dead

Founded over a thousand years ago by Vikings, Dublin has had plenty of time to acquire more than its fair share of haunted history. In the Irish capital city the dead don't necessarily stay buried and an inquisitive visitor can be guaranteed a few anomalous experiences with Dublin's deceased residents.

The Dublin ghost bus leaves the main thoroughfare of O'Connell Street in the evenings to whisk tourists around Georgian streets and graveyards with gruesome tales of body-snatchers in St Kevin's Cemetery and a ghostly green lady and a leper in the medieval surroundings of St Audeon's church and the Forty Steps.

For those who like to explore further afield, St. Michan's Church of Ireland Church is located away from the main tourist trails in an inner city area behind the Four Courts. Built in 1686 on the site of an 11th century Viking church, the composer Händel is reputed to have practiced his "Messiah" on the organ here prior to its premiere in Dublin, but St. Michan's crypt hides a grisly secret. Its limestone walls and the cool, dry atmosphere with an unusually high concentration of methane gas, have resulted in the mummification of the bodies stored in its vaults. In publicly displayed lidless coffins four corpses are preserved to such an extent that fingernails and facial features can still be recognised. One body that's unfortunately missing a hand is nicknamed "The Thief", whereas an extremely tall corpse with its legs crossed and folded into the coffin is known as "The Crusader". According to Dublin tradition it's considered particularly lucky to shake hands with the Crusader, but given the fragile and dessicated state of the body anyone brave enough to try this might come away with more than they bargained for...

...The crypts also hold the remains of the Sheares brothers from Cork, leaders of the United Irishmen, they were executed for their part in the 1798 rebellion. When their bodies were more recently removed to new coffins it was discovered that as well as being hanged, they had also been drawn and quartered, the traditional punishment for treason. The original death warrant is also on display.



St Michan's Church hides a grisly secret



An easy walk from the city centre, the Carmelite Church on Whitefriar Street holds the remains, or at least some of them, of St. Valentine. The body of the saint and a small vial tinged with his blood were given as a gift from Pope Gregory XVI to a Dublin priest in 1836 "for the public veneration of the faithful". The church also has a statue of a black oak Madonna on display and if a prayer at Saint Valentine's ornate shrine fails to sort out your love life, you can always hedge your bets with another at their shrine to St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes.

If a visit to St Valentine has left you in a romantic mood, then retire to the nearby Shelbourne Hotel. Overlooking St Stephen's Green Park this is one of Dublin's grandest (and most expensive) places to stay. Naturally it comes equipped with a resident ghost. In August 1965, in room 526, paranormal researcher Hans Holzer and occultist Sybil Leek (1917-1982) reportedly encountered the small spirit of a crying child, about 7 years old and dressed in a woollen nightshirt. Passing into a mediumistic trance Leek reported that the child was called "Mary Masters", she seemed ill and she was searching for her older sister "Sophie". Further investigations revealed that room 526 had been added to the hotel just 30 years previously and no record was found of the name "Masters". Nevertheless Holzer concluded that they must have encountered the spirit of a child

who had died around 1846 in one of the group of houses that the Shelbourne had originally been constructed from.

A more reliable collection of spirits can be found in the hotel bar.



The Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin

Additional Information

The Dublin Ghost Bus

www.dublinbus.ie/sightseeing/ghostbus.aspx

St. Michan's Church

www.dublintonline.com/details/st_michans_church.shtml

Whitefriar Street Church

www.carmelites.ie/Ireland/Whitefriar%20St/valentine.htm

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Project Albion is part of one of ASSAP's longest running and most successful heritage and research endeavours.

It has been likened to a "Domesday book of the paranormal". It is an attempt to record the full spectrum of anomalies, past and present, within their geographical, as well as historical, context. While surveys of phenomena like apparitions and UFOs have been done before, it is unlikely that such a census of so many kinds of anomaly has ever been attempted before nationwide.

Get Involved

To promote heritage and research, ASSAP News will carry an Albion spread in each edition. This is your opportunity to record, for posterity, some of the local oral traditions in your area. If you would like to compile a two-page article with some images please contact our new Albion Officer at albion@assap.org

Our Albion Officer can also provide guidance on conducting a full Albion Project in your area. Recent Albion Projects include Haunted Swindon (HauntedSwindon.com) and Strange Stroud (parafort.com/strangestroud)



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