

NEWS

Issue 127 Summer 2009

Inside This Issue: Rupert Sheldrake's Telephone Telepathy

- 3 ASSAP Insider: Vernon Harrison Scholarships**
- 4 Training and Events: Summer Events**
- 6 Paranormal 101: All About Ghosts**
- 8 Focus On: Telephone Telepathy**
- 10 President's Piece: Oak Island Mystery**
- 11 Research: Charles Bonnet Syndrome**
- 13 Interview: Damian Hamill**
- 14 Heritage: The Ghosts of Prestbury**



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!

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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



Introducing the Vernon Harrison Scholarships

ASSAP is proud to announce the introduction of the Dr Vernon Harrison Memorial Scholarship, aimed at making ASSAP Training more accessible to those in need.

Accessibility for anyone who wants to learn and improve has always been a key part of ASSAP's education aim. ASSAP events have always prided themselves on being 'cheap and cheerful' so residential weekends can be provided for less than £30, around ten times cheaper than most organisations.

Now the ASSAP Executive has decided to go even further to promote accessibility. From 2009 there will be two scholarship places at the ASSAP Training Weekend. Applicants should be in need – in other words not able to come without the scholarship – and be willing to give a small amount of time back.

Generous concession rates have also been introduced for 2009, allowing those who are demonstrably in need (e.g. on low or no income) to apply for a discount.

Who was Dr Vernon Harrison?

VGW Harrison (1912-2001) was a founder member of ASSAP and was the charity's first National Research Co-ordinator. As well as being influential in the forming of our Association, Dr Harrison was one of a number of ASSAP members influential in other fields. Vernon Harrison was a former President of the Royal Photographic Society (a learned society founded in 1853) and was a professional analyst of forgeries and counterfeits. Dr Harrison was involved with the analysis of several high profile photos, including Loch Ness Monster images.

Become a Vernon Harrison Scholar!

Contact Matt at assapevents@assap.org to find out more about the scholarships or the concessionary rates. Otherwise please do sign up to attend the ASSAP Training Weekend right away!

ASSAP Investigations and Events: Change at the Top

The role of ASSAP National Investigations Co-ordinator has often been too onerous for one, or even two, volunteers to be expected to fill.



Joint AAI and Group Co-ordinators George Gregg and Andrew Homer

A shake-up of the department has seen the entry of Andrew Homer and Dr George Gregg – both of long-standing affiliated group Parasearch – as joint AAI and Groups Co-ordinators. Former NIC Bill Eyre stays on in the new position of Case Co-ordinator. ASSAP Trainer Nicky Sewell and Secretary Trystan Swale have filled the new roles of New AAI Assessor and Case Quality Officer respectively.

Matt Hicks has also joined the Executive as Events Officer. Matt has been Managing Editor of *Anomaly* for some years and is part of affiliated group Staffordshire Paranormal Study Group.



L-R Nicky Sewell, Matt Hicks, Trystan Swale

Last Call for Anomaly

The 2009 edition of *Anomaly: the Journal of Paranormal Research*, is looking sparse and needs your help! If you can contribute an article (either desk-based research or experimental research) or a book review please email Dave at assapchairman@assap.org

TRAINING WEEKEND 2009



This year, the ASSAP Training Weekend takes place at the Oxenwood Centre in Wiltshire on the 28th and 29th November.

This is a lovely scenic setting for what is always a great chance to sharpen investigation skills and of course socialise with fellow ASSAP members. The centre is located close to both the M4 and the M3 so it is easily accessible, and as usual overnight accommodation will be available.

Investigating the paranormal in a reasoned and scientific manner can often be a complex task, and the overall purpose of the course is to provide guidance on ASSAP's methods for getting the most out of investigations.

For those looking to gain AAI status, the training weekend is a brilliant way to start the process and provides really valuable experience for future involvement in ASSAP cases. Current AAI's will also find much to learn to expand on existing skills and can use the event towards renewing their status. There is always plenty of time for socialising, sharing hints and tips and making contacts with people in other groups from all around the country.

This year the training weekend will cost £27, which includes accommodation on Saturday evening as well as lunch on Saturday and breakfast and lunch on Sunday. There is also a concessionary rate and a number of scholarship places to help those who may otherwise find the cost prohibitive.

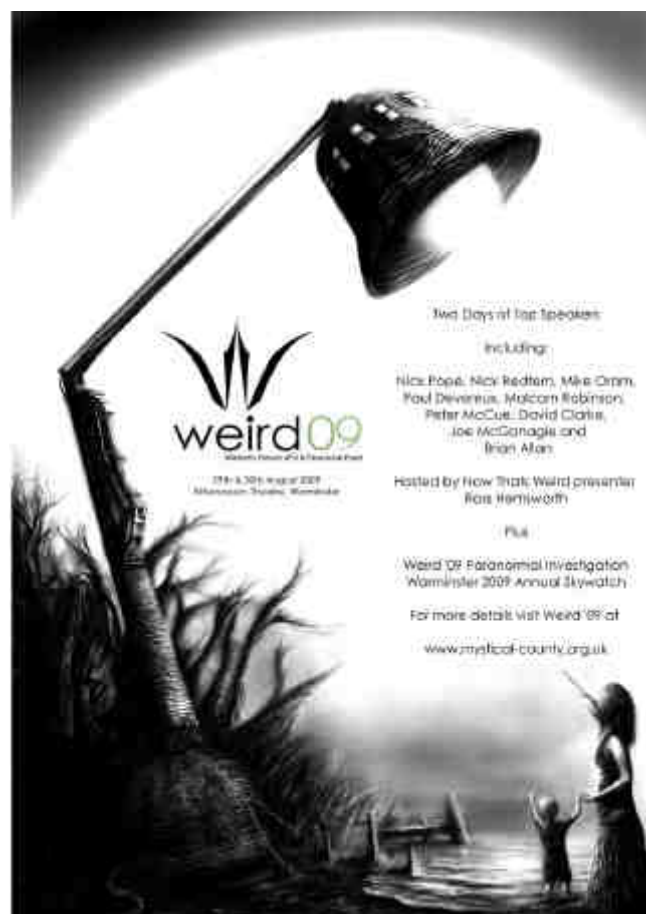
For more information on the event including concessions eligibility and the scholarship scheme, get in touch with our events officer Matt via assapevents@assap.org. We have only a limited number of tickets, so book soon to make sure of your place!

Weird '09, Wiltshire's premier UFO and paranormal event is to be held on 29th and 30th August 2009.

Weird '09 will be held over two days at the Athenaeum Theatre in the small town of Warminster, once the UFO capital of the UK, and possibly the world, with over 5000 sightings reported over a ten year period. Warminster nestles in the beautiful rural countryside of Wiltshire, within easy striking distance of important ancient monuments, including Stonehenge, Avebury, West Kennet Long Barrow and Silbury Hill. The impressive Iron Age hill forts of Battlesbury and Scratchbury are also close by. You will also be able to join the annual Warminster Sky Watch at the fabled Cradle Hill and participate in a paranormal investigation over the weekend.

Tickets are £15 PER DAY OR £25 for a weekend pass and can only be bought on the official web site and no where else.

Please note: Special Care Baby Unit
Weird '09 will be raising funds for the Swindon Great Western Hospital SCBU. The funds will be raised during the conference and will take the form of raffles for exclusive UFO and paranormal items donated and signed by our guest speakers. Donation points will also be available.





**The Community Centre
Woolfardisworthy
North Devon UK**

14th - 16th August 2009

www.cfz.org.uk

Tel: +44(0) 1237 431413

Weird weekend 2009



The Weird Weekend is the largest yearly gathering of mystery animal investigators in the English-speaking world. Now in its tenth year, the convention attracts speakers and visitors from all over the world and showcases the findings of investigators into strange phenomena.

Cryptozoologists, parapsychologists, ufologists, and folklorists are descending on Woolfardisworthy Community Centre to share their findings and insights. Unlike other events, the Weird Weekend will also include workshops giving tips to budding paranormal investigators, and even a programme of special events for children. The Weird Weekend is the only forteen conference in the world that is truly a family event, although those veterans of previous events should be reassured that it is still as anarchically silly as ever!

The event is raising money for the Centre for Fortean Zoology, the world's only full time, professional cryptozoological organisation.

THE ANTIDOTE FOR NORMALITY; YOU'VE NEVER HAD IT SO WEIRD



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.

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 include: Chris French, Jason Braithwaite, Nick Pope, David Wilde, Karen Douglas, Chris Roe, Xavier Mendik, Emma Louise Rhodes, Christine Mohr, John Walliss.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND BOOKING DETAILS

GO TO <http://www.ukskeptics.com/conference-2009.php> OR



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 9: All about ghosts

Q: Huge numbers of people investigate ghosts these days, why is that?

A: The short answer is the media coverage of ghosts, particularly the TV ghost hunting programmes. The long answer is that, unlike other anomalies, ghosts are tied to a specific location making them much easier to study. Despite that, there is still a lot of misinformation on the subject.

Q: What sort of misinformation?

A: The public takes their idea of ghost largely from legend and fiction. There are endless stories about what ghosts are supposed to do, where they should appear, why they appear, and so on, most of it not backed up by any substantial body of evidence. Real life cases are, when carefully investigated, quite different to tradition.

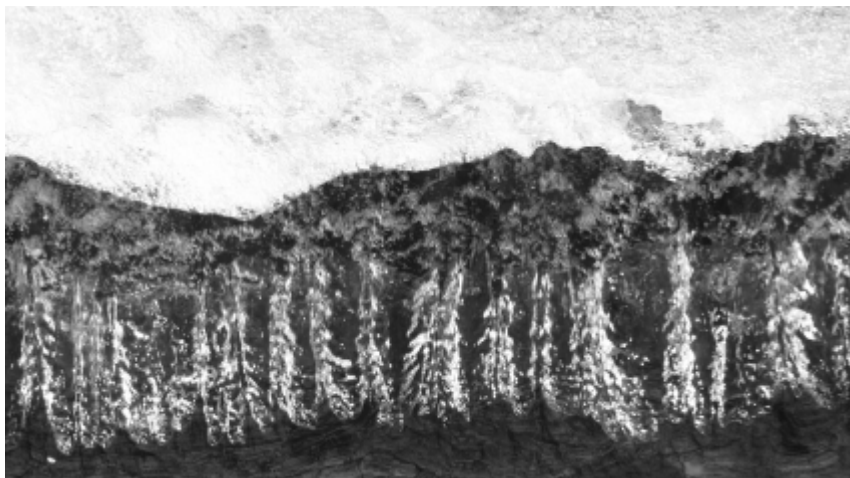
Q: But lots of people go on ghost vigils. They must get a good idea of what ghosts are really like.

A: Though many people attend vigils at haunted locations, very few actually see ghosts. The same is true of the TV ghost hunting shows. While lots of odd things may happen on vigils, it is only an assumption that these have anything specifically to do with ghosts.

Q: But surely it is ghosts that inhabit haunted places, don't they?

A: That's a good example of public misinformation. It is important to differentiate between ghosts and haunting phenomena. Traditionally, of course, ghosts are said to haunt particular places. When there is an outbreak of paranormal activity in a particular location, it is labelled a haunting, which is unfortunate. Ghosts are, in fact, only seen in a minority of hauntings. Furthermore, they are reported in one-off incidents well away from any haunting outbreak. Interestingly, ghosts have never been seen actually moving objects or causing strange noises or any other haunting phenomena. It is just assumed that ghosts are responsible for those things, despite the lack of any direct evidence. It would be more accurate to say that ghost

sightings are one of several possible symptoms of what we call a haunting. Overall, the evidence suggests that hauntings may sometimes produce ghost sightings, rather than the other way round.



Here come the white ghosts!

Q: If we've got ghosts wrong, what do we really know about them?

A: To answer that it is first necessary to define ghosts in terms of the evidence from actual cases, rather than using traditional ideas. From the case evidence, a ghost is a human (or sometimes animal) figure, witnessed by someone, which cannot be physically present. Other definitions of ghosts, including traditional ones, interpret their nature far beyond what the evidence actually shows. That may be fine for people to understand

the plots of ghost stories and horror movies but it is no practical use in real ghost research.

From cases we know that ghosts can appear anywhere, anytime. They don't show any preference for particular places or times. They usually look entirely normal, not transparent or white (see photo) or glowing, like in the movies. One thing that real ghosts do share with their traditional fictional counterpart is the ability to vanish. Indeed, that may be the first indication to the witness that they are seeing a ghost. When ghosts don't vanish, witnesses may only realise they've seen a ghost after the experience. Some ghosts wear period costume but this only seems to have been happening since the start of the twentieth century. Ghosts are usually not identifiable as particular people by those who witness them (a notable exception being crisis apparitions). In the vast majority of cases, ghosts do not interact with witnesses in any way, appearing not to notice their presence. Similarly, they seem to have no observable effect on their environment.

Q: So what is a haunting?

A: A haunting is an outbreak of apparently paranormal activity confined to one location. It might include odd noises, strange lights and smells, object movement, cold spots and sometimes ghosts. Outbreaks can last from days to decades. An interesting point about hauntings is that the activity is not spread uniformly throughout a haunted location but is restricted to a few hot spots. A hot spot is small, often just a single room, sometimes only part of one. These hot spots produce repeated reports of the same kind of activity over and over again. So the noise of footsteps might only ever be heard in one room and an apparition only ever be seen in another. This does not fit in with the idea of a ghost 'haunting' a particular location. Why would it only perform certain activities in particular places, repeatedly?

Hauntings tend to show no obvious aim or purpose. The same activity happens at the same hot spots at irregular, unpredictable intervals. This doesn't fit in with the traditional idea of a purposeful ghost actively 'haunting' a place.

Q: What about ghost detectors?

A: Some people claim that ghosts have detectable effects on their environment, such as emitting electromagnetic fields or negative ions. However, there seems to be little or no evidence to support the idea. It's not that surprising given that so few ghosts are ever seen and no doubt very few indeed when someone has an EMF meter to hand!

If you drop the idea that ghosts necessarily cause hauntings, you could argue that 'ghost detectors' might actually indicate haunted locations. However, there are so many natural causes for 'spikes' from EMF meters and ion detectors that it is difficult to definitely isolate genuinely anomalous readings. In any case, the data are so inconsistent, and reports made to such different standards, no case can really be made for ghost detectors on the current available evidence.

Q: Not much of this sounds like the traditional view of ghosts!

A: The popular view of ghosts comes largely from legends and fiction, rather than real life cases. Even when real cases are reported in the media, there is a notable slant towards traditional ideas, even when the account plainly doesn't support that view. Sadly, since the reality of ghosts and hauntings is always overshadowed by the popular view, serious ghost research will always be held back.

Further information:

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Ghosts.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Have%20you%20seen%20a%20ghost.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Culture.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Scientific%20ghost%20research.html>

<http://www.assap.org/newsite/articles/Ghosts%20EMF%20meters%20and%20baselines.html>

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TELEPHONE TELEPATHY

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

By Rupert Sheldrake

In traditional societies, telepathy was generally taken for granted, and was the only means of rapid communication at a distance. In modern societies we have telephones, but telepathy has not gone away. Someone's intention to make a call often seems to be picked up telepathically before the call itself. Most people have had the experience of thinking of someone who calls soon afterwards, and remarking, "I was just thinking about you!"

Surveys in Europe and America show this is by far the commonest kind of apparent telepathy in the modern world.

But could there be a more mundane explanation? People may think of others from time to time for no particular reason, and if someone they are thinking of then calls, this may be a matter of chance. People may simply forget all the times they think of someone who does not ring.

This is a reasonable possibility, but there is no evidence for it. The only way to resolve the question scientifically is by experiment.

I have developed a simple procedure in which subjects receive a call from one of four different callers within a prearranged period. The subjects nominate the callers themselves, usually close friends or family members. They do not know who will be calling in any given test, because the caller is picked at random by the experimenter by the throw of a die. Subjects have to guess who the caller is before picking up the receiver. By chance they would be right about one time in four, or 25% of the time. In many of these trials, the participants are videotaped continuously to make sure that they do not receive any other telephone calls or emails that could give them any clues.

My colleague Pam Smart and I conducted hundreds of trials. The average success rate is 45%, very significantly above the chance level of 25%, with statistical odds against chance of billions to one.

I also carried out an experiment for television, starring the Nolan sisters, whose hit rate was 50%.

A 5-minute clip showing this experiment is online on youtube, with a link from my web site.

Pam and I also carried out a series of trials in which two of the four callers were familiar, and the other two were strangers, whose names the participants knew, but whom they had not met. With familiar callers, the success rate was more than 50%, highly significant statistically.



With strangers it was near the chance level, in agreement with the observation that telepathy typically takes place between people who share emotional or social bonds.

In addition, we have found that these effects do not fall off with distance. In some of our tests the callers were in Australia or New Zealand, but the subjects identified them just as well as

callers nearby. The details of these experiments are published in scientific journals and can be read online on my web site (www.sheldrake.org). Our positive findings in telephone telepathy tests have now been replicated at the universities of Amsterdam and Freiburg.



Telepathy is said to be the transference of thoughts between two subjects, Ganzfeld has been a traditional experimental method

TELEPHONE TELEPATHY

Continued...

Telepathy continues to evolve. One of its latest manifestations is the telepathic email. People think of someone who shortly afterwards sends them an email. We have done more than 700 tests on email telepathy, following a similar design to the telephone tests, with an average hit rate of 43%, again very significantly above the chance level of 25%. Again the results have been published in a peer-reviewed journal and are available on my web site.



Parapsychologists have long studied telepathy, as a form of ESP, using Zener Cards

The latest experiment of this kind is an automated telephone telepathy test that works through mobile phones, making it possible for anyone to take part

wherever they are (as long as they are in the UK). For this test, each subject needs only three contacts, who should be familiar people like friends or family members. The results so far are way above chance and highly significant statistically. I would be delighted if ASSAP members could try this themselves, and encourage their friends to do it too. The details are given on my web site at the Online Experiments Portal.



©Rupert Sheldrake 2009

Dr Rupert Sheldrake is a biologist and author of more than 80 technical papers and several books. His most

recent books are *The Sense of Being Stared At, And Other Aspects of the Extended Mind* (Arrow, £8.99) and a fully revised and updated edition of *A New Science of Life* (Icon, £9.99). His web site is www.sheldrake.org

TRAINING & EVENTS

Information

Another date for your diary!

Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies Conference & AGM



Friday 18th - Sunday 20th September 2009
Nightingale Centre, Greak Hucklow, Derbyshire

Weekend conference at the historic Nightingale Centre in the beautiful Peak District.
Accommodation available.

Conference on Saturday 19th. Three speakers, lunch provided.

To find out further details about speakers, prices etc contact David Taylor on: 07505 323443. Email: david.taylor@parasearch.org.uk or Hazel Reynolds 0121 554 1638.



The Oak Island Treasure Mystery... in Nova Scotia

We made our first visit to Oak Island, in Mahone Bay, just off the coast of Nova Scotia, over twenty years ago, to study the mystery on site and gather first hand data for the book on it that we were then writing.

The story of the Oak Island Money Pit begins in 1795 with three teenaged boys: Daniel McGinnis, Anthony Vaughan and John Smith. They discovered a clearing among the oaks that gave the island its name. Beside it stood one big, sturdy old tree with a branch lopped short and an old ship's block and tackle hanging from it. Living in the era that they did, the boys immediately thought of pirates' treasure. They went home for picks and shovels and began to dig. There was a depressed area where someone had once shifted earth in the centre of the clearing immediately below the lopped branch, and as the boys began moving the soil there they found that they were re-excavating a shaft about four metres in diameter. The sides were of brick hard clay that still bore the marks of the picks and shovels used by the original diggers. Just over a metre down, the boys found a layer of flat stones that seemed to have been brought to the island from Gold River, which empties into Mahone Bay in which Oak Island and hundreds of others lie.

The boys prized out the stones and dug down deeper. Every ten feet or so, at regular intervals, they encountered layers of oak logs let into the hard clay sides of the shaft. They decided that they needed much more manpower and better digging equipment to tackle a shaft of these dimensions. An adult expedition led by Simeon Lynds got down to a depth of over 100 feet, encountering more of the oak log platforms, layers of putty, coconut fibre and caulking clay as they dug ever deeper.



Gold River near Oak Island



Aerial view of Oak Island

Deep in the shaft they uncovered a mysterious engraved stone, which some cryptographers have translated as *Forty feet below two million pounds are buried.*

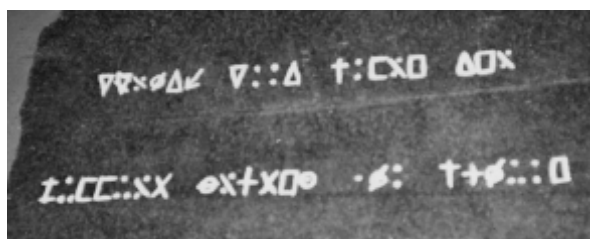
Other experts on ancient languages, including Professor Barry Fell and our Nova Scotian friend George Young, have come up with totally different translations suggesting that the shaft was an incredibly well protected grave rather than a treasure pit.

Disaster struck for the Lynds team when the Money Pit flooded to within a few feet of the surface. It was later discovered that whoever had constructed it had dug at least two flood tunnels from the artificial beach in Smith's Cove so that anyone who did not know how to cut off the flood water before digging would almost certainly drown in the depths of the shaft. The artificial beach had been constructed to reinforce the flood tunnels so that they did not silt up.



Patricia on the artificial beach at Smith's Cove, Oak Island

On numerous subsequent visits, we met the tirelessly determined Dan Blankenship, an American Army war hero, who has spent most of his life working to locate the Oak Island treasure. Dan was nearly killed down in Borehole 10X which he had constructed close to the Money Pit, when the sides collapsed under pressure from the floodwater and moving clay. Dan showed us some intriguing footage from an underwater camera that had been placed in 10X. It seemed to show several man made artefacts in a flooded labyrinth below the island: all very mysterious.



Replica of the coded stone



Lionel and Dan at the top of borehole 10X

Drilling down to the depths of the shaft through the floodwater has brought tantalizing objects to the surface: links of gold chain, a

scrap of parchment with a few letters on it, and a jewel that was stolen by a drilling foreman named Pitblado, who left the island with it and was later killed in an industrial accident.

Work still goes on there today using the latest technology – and our friend Dan is still very much involved with it. Numerous useful websites (easily found with a good search engine) record the latest treasure hunting progress.

Over two centuries have elapsed since Smith, Vaughan and McGinnis found the top of the shaft – but the mystery of the Oak Island Money Pit is as intriguing today as it was in 1795.



View down borehole 10X

All text and pictures © Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe 2009

Seeing things that ain't so: CHARLES BONNET SYNDROME

**"Yesterday upon the stair,
I met a man who wasn't there.
He wasn't there again today.
I wish that man would go away!"**

By Dr Wendy Cousins

If you looked up to find a small green dragon dancing about on top of your television set or the plump form of your long dead grandmother sitting placidly on your sofa would you think you were going mad? Or would you think you were seeing spirits? Perhaps the answer may lie elsewhere in a little known medical condition called Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

This condition is named after the Swiss philosopher Charles Bonnet (1720-1793), who first described it in 1760 after noticing that his perfectly sane grandfather saw patterns, birds and figures that simply weren't there. It affects those who have failing vision and is especially common

among the elderly. Sometimes it might also occur in people with normal eye sight, caused by migraine and strokes, flashing lights or disordered sleeping patterns. The condition is caused by lack of visual stimulation and not by any mental dysfunction. When a person's sight is failing there are not as many signals being sent to the visual part of their brain. So while struggling to make sense of the fragments of data it does still receive, the under stimulated brain may then start generating signals of its own to fill the gaps. This process has been referred to as the "idle musing of the brain". These episodes often occur when the patient is in a relaxed state, for example resting or in bed.

CHARLES BONNET SYNDROME *cont'd*

These Charles Bonnet hallucinations are not comparable to dreams - people never see the images when they are asleep. The vision unfolds on top of reality, rather like watching two films at once. In one case reported in the British Medical Journal an 87 year old man with impaired vision of seeing people and animals in his —including bears and Highland cattle. This had been going on for six weeks and he also sometimes saw swarms of flies and blue fish across the room. He knew that these visions were not real and they didn't bother him much, but he thought he might be losing his mind. The visions lasted for minutes to hours, and the cattle used to stare at him while quietly munching away at the grass. These visions tended occur more in the darkness of evening before he switched on the lights.

While once thought to be a rare phenomenon, Charles Bonnet syndrome has been found to be much more common than previously suspected. In a study of 48 patients with visual impairments carried out by doctors at Plymouth's Royal Eye Infirmary it was found that 30 (63%) had

experienced hallucinations. In contrast, no-one in a control group of similar people with normal vision experienced any hallucination.

Significantly, none of the visually impaired group spontaneously volunteered information about their hallucinatory experiences to doctors, but only admitted to this in response to indirect or direct questioning. All of this group were in good mental health and displayed insight into the unreality of the hallucinations but had chosen not to mention them before for fear of being labelled as mentally ill. Not surprisingly, this reticence to disclose symptoms has led to the condition being under-recognised and under-diagnosed by the medical professions.

Unfortunately this condition is still difficult to treat effectively. However, often the visual hallucinations stop on their own in response to an improvement or further deterioration of vision. Knowing that it is poor vision and not mental illness that is causing these images can also often help people to come to terms with them. The ageing profile of the UK population, and the increased prevalence of sight-related problems such as macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy, it might also be expected that the number of people experiencing Charles Bonnet hallucinations will also rise. Perhaps you may already know some of them?

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Further Information:

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_rnib003641.hcsp

Anu Jacob, Sanjeev Prasad, Mike Boggild, and Sanjeev Chandratre

Charles Bonnet syndrome—elderly people and visual hallucinations

British Medical Journal 2004; 328: 1552-1554.

Phantoms in the Brain by Sandra Blakelee & V.S. Ramachandran: Chapter 5 The Secret Life of James Thurber.



Dr Wendy Cousins Interviews **DAMIAN HAMILL**

Damian Hamill is a clinical hypnotherapist and author. He is a hypnotherapy educator with the BST Foundation, providers of the only hypnosis courses in the UK to have achieved university accreditation. BST Foundation training is also recognised for Continued Professional Development (CPD) for psychiatrists psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors. Damian's first book "Inner States: Foundation Skills in Clinical Hypnosis" will be available later in 2009. He is now working on his second book intriguingly entitled "Luck - why it doesn't exist and how to get more of it".

So how long have you been interested in Hypnosis? How would you define it?

I've been interested as long as I can remember! I first started looking at it is something 'learnable' about 20 years ago and I've been studying the subject ever since then. There's no agreed definition of what hypnosis actually is, but to describe it generally, it seems to be a frame of mind which people can access during which they can tap into abilities and capacities which are not otherwise easily accessible and which they can then creatively use.

What sort of thing do you mean?

Well, for example, most people have an ability to ignore discomfort from time to time. In a hypnotic state you can achieve an even more profound kind of selective awareness in which even quite intrusive stimuli can be filtered out. For example, on one training course, I was observing students practice a hypnotic induction, bringing someone into hypnotic trance. During the exercise a Chinook military helicopter flew over head. It was an almighty racket, rattling the windows, but afterwards when I mentioned it to the woman who'd been inducing trance she didn't know what I was talking

about. What helicopter? She had felt so deeply absorbed in what was happening that the noise had not disrupted her experience - and she wasn't even the trance subject!

There's also hypermnesia- a kind of enhanced memory. For example, last weekend I was on an NLP and psychotherapy course and we were doing guided imagery within trance in natural landscapes and for me, I was on a seashore - very windswept and bleak and for some reason the word "Barra" popped into my mind. I had no idea what it meant but as soon as I came out of trance I wrote it down and Googled it when I got home. It turned out that Barra is a Hebridean island, one of the Outer Hebrides and it's just that sort of windswept place that I'd been visualising. Now my conscious mind didn't know there was an Isle of Barra, but my unconscious mind did and it gave that word to me as a cue. I must have read about the place sometime but had consciously completely forgotten about it and didn't recover the association until it was gifted to me in hypnosis. In hypnotherapy you can also help people to code or recode disturbing memories so they can be less emotionally troubling.

So how do you get people into a hypnotic state?

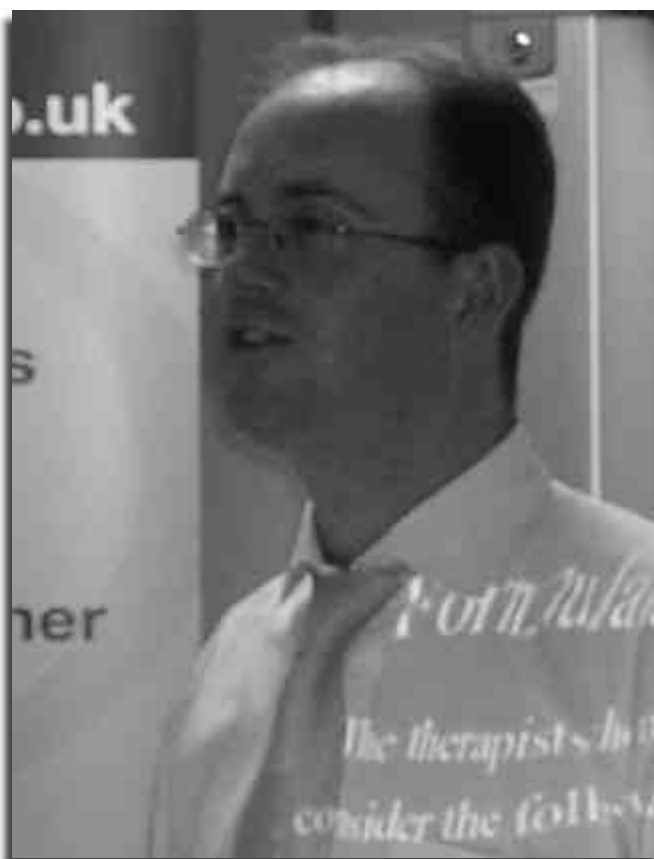
People can access hypnoidal states without even being in a formal hypnotic situation.

The legendary hypnotherapist Milton Erickson described this as "common everyday trance"! Environmental factors, group dynamics, common belief systems, repetitive rhythms, fatigue can all foster shared trance phenomena and the way explanations for these are framed and filtered.

So you don't need to swing a pocket watch at anyone then?

I have to confess that I don't have a swinging watch at all!

Website: <http://www.bstfoundation.co.uk/index.php>



Damian Hamill



29 AND COUNTING...

THE GHOSTS OF PRESTBURY

Largely forgotten in recent years as a contender to the crown of Britain's most haunted village, Prestbury is now viewed as just another suburb of Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. But the tales of apparitions have never gone away and have actually increased; as of the beginning of 2009 at least twenty nine distinct ghosts have been recorded in print. More remarkable is the fact the majority of these can be found on the rectangular route of streets surrounding the parish church of St Mary's.

Much to the chagrin of the local clergy it is the church where Prestbury's most well known apparition begins its three annual walks. Every Easter Sunday, All Saints' Day and Christmas Day the cowed Black Abbot paces through the churchyard to nearby Deep Street. Here he knocks on the door of Reform Cottage and stomps upstairs. It seems the Abbot is not restricted to these three scheduled forays around the village, being seen throughout the area on numerous other occasions. Most famously local photographer Derek Stafford claimed to have captured his dark shape on film in St Mary's churchyard, although analysis in 2009 suggests the image may be no more than a double exposure.

Behind the church is Mill Street. A ragged, elderly lady was seen gathering sticks outside a cottage on a number of occasions in the 1970s. Here we also encounter the first of Prestbury's ghostly horsemen. Tradition holds that during the First English Civil War a Royalist dispatch rider was demounted by Parliamentarian sympathisers using a rope stretched across the road. Captured and killed, the dark shade of

the rider has been seen and heard charging his horse in the direction of Gloucester.

A short distance west of The Plough the road snakes in the shape of a 'w'. It was here during an evening in 1982 that an unnamed teenager allegedly found his route along the raised pavement blocked by a man wearing a light coloured raincoat. The figure turned and dazzled the boy with a white light from within the palm of its hand. At this point it was realised the man had neither face nor lower legs. Any opportunity to get a closer look at the apparition passed with its instantaneous disappearance.

High Street is linked to more ghosts than any other road in the village, although many are mundane. The Old Post Office and Old Butchers Shop are just two of the buildings under the watch of an elderly woman in 'old fashioned' clothes who peers through windows. Both buildings also became venues for apparent poltergeist activity during the 20th century. In the Old Post Office objects would be moved from shelves in the living quarters and placed upon the floor by an unseen hand. Events from the Old Butchers

Shop are more diverse; over a brief succession of nights items would be taken from the store room and placed in an untidy pile upon the shop floor. Yet as suddenly as events began they halted in an equally abrupt fashion.

To the west is The Burgage where Prestbury House Hotel holds pride of place. Contemporary rumours have suggested the 17th century manor contains an upstairs room made inaccessible at some point during the 1970s. Workmen fitting a water tank purportedly left it in a hurry, stating they had seen the apparition of a white-bearded man. Wielding a large stick, he ordered the workers to 'get out!' Better known are the small girl who haunts the gardens and the mysterious sound of horses' hoof-steps which accompany the apparition of horse and rider.



St Mary's Church



The view down Mill Street

human skeleton, complete with an arrow head lodged between its ribs.

Other roads in Prestbury are less haunted but they still have curious tales to tell. A glowing figure haunts the allotments off Bouncer's Lane whilst a school teacher approaching Prestbury on Southam Road witnessed what resembled a Victorian funeral procession passing through a field beneath Queen's Wood. A former student house was, for a time, scene to classic poltergeist activity. Doors and light switches would be operated of their own accord whilst tenants complained of hearing loud footsteps emanating from empty rooms. Finally, an edition of Source and Shopping Weekly from 1983 cited witness reports of a 'leering

Another horseman seen and heard at The Burgage, is less distinct in appearance but far more famous. He is considered to be a messenger riding from Edward IV's camp during the Battle of Tewkesbury (4th May 1471). Passing through the village he succumbed to a single arrow, shot by a waiting archer. Road works on Shaw Green Lane in the early 20th century unearthed a

monk' inside a particular residence. This has predictably drawn suspicions that this may represent another sighting of the infamous Black Abbott.

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PROJECT

Albion



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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