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# CERDIC THE SAXON - A LIFE (PART 2)

by Hugh Pincott

**Continuing the extraordinary life of Cerdic the Saxon, an apparent past life found in one of ASSAP's early projects on hypnosis. We left our hero just about to fight one of the most famous battles of all history - Hastings in 1066.**

Cerdic and his fellow-fighters were assembled on a hilltop around a camp fire; the fires of William and his hosts could be seen in the distance. Cerdic outlined the events leading up to the confrontation. But an odd thing now happened.

I asked non-leading questions, answers to which were in the history book open in front of me. And when Cerdic responded, the details were practically word for word according to the printed page, confirming little items like fighting under the Dragon banner of the king. It was almost as though Don was reading the book telepathically through my eyes. This sort of thing happened more than once and is discussed later.

Then I asked Cerdic something of a trick question - and there were no references to this in the history book. I invited him to look up and describe the night sky. He did so: 'A bright, clear sky, stars, a quarter moon ....'

I asked him to look especially carefully for anything unusual. The popular modern impression, and one fostered by the concentration of events on the Bayeux Tapestry, suggests that Halley's Comet was seen on the eve of the battle at Hastings. This was not so, of course, as we were relieved to hear Cerdic confirm.

'Not now', he said, 'There was some time ago, a great fire in the sky - an omen - seven or eight months ago .... like a torch-head sweeping across the sky ...'

An omen it might have been though, for the English lost the battle the following day, basically because they broke ranks and were enticed into a trap. The then king, Harold, was killed by an arrow - not as popular account has it by hitting him in the eye, but according to Cerdic, 'It was said that an arrow bounced off a shield into his face.' At the end of the day Cerdic and the survivors fled the field and he passed the next and last two years of his life as an outlaw. His death and what happened afterwards fascinate too.

We returned to the battle on several occasions, and in fact devoted two whole sessions to this alone. We have an almost minute-by-minute, blow-by-blow, account, which is worth researching in more depth.

## **The Censor**

In the life of Cerdic there was nothing our researchers could find material fault with: the historical facts are strikingly accurate. Some very minor discrepancies exist certainly, but nothing to invalidate the idea that something most unusual was going on. This is not yet to suggest that the Cerdic character is a 'genuine' past life. Detailed records of the period are virtually non-existent, and what is known to have happened is fairly accessible should anyone take the trouble to research it. But try as we did on many occasions, Cerdic was never caught out knowing more than he should!

He did however occasionally censor when he thought he was being tricked - he refused to name MacBeth as king of the Scots, when asked for his name (as one of several multiple-choice questions we often put). It probably sounded too obvious, even though it was in fact true.

Cerdic, the name of the legendary founder of Wessex, is thought to be of British origin. Our Cerdic married Sibel (or Cybele), wise woman or seer (Greek moon goddess), at a stone circle on the Welsh border in a ceremony that sounds like a Celtic sacred marriage of a king to his land. He could not run off his geneology back to some god or heroic ancestor (for example, the legendary Cerdic above), which is supposedly second nature to the Saxon/Germanic tribes that settled in Western Europe.

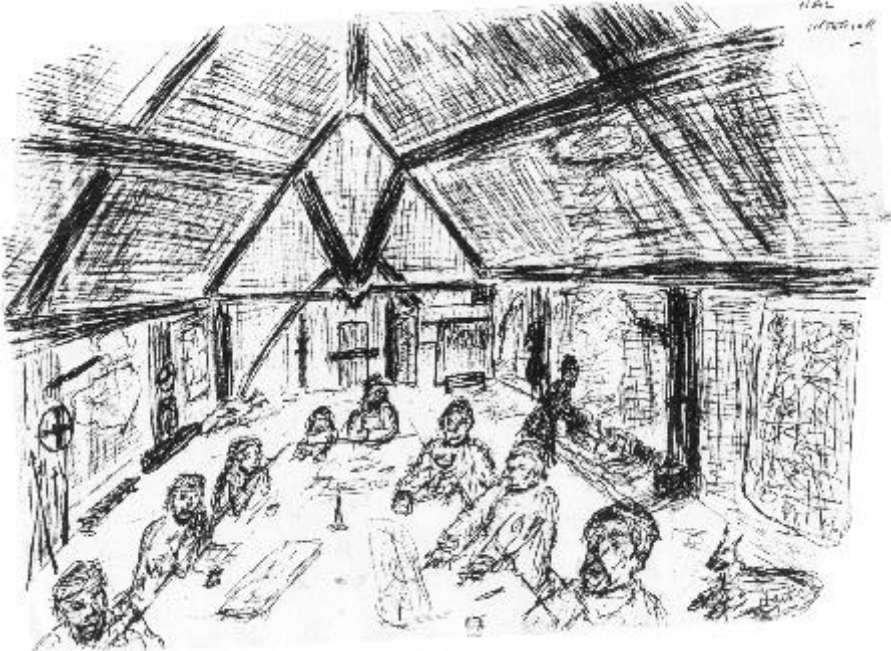
Our Cerdic gave the 'classic' Battle of Hastings scenario, untroubled by the new-fangled ideas voiced in recent years, and most of his 'old ways' festival celebrations are again more Celtic than Saxon (or Jute, from whom he claims descent). I would go further and say that I have personally encountered far more convincing characters in previous researches - intimate details of whose existences have been well and truly proven. But what makes Cerdic unique, and the events entirely without precedent in scientific research, is what happened next.

## The Drawings

Before taking early retirement, Don Brown was a Senior Schools Inspector, and earlier in his career was a teacher and headmaster. His subject was geography, not history. Don was also a prominent local councillor. Consequently he spent a great deal of time in long and often boring committee meetings. As many people do, he doodled. Traditionally he did so with the geometric dot and angle pattern characterising a precise, logical mind.

The week in which the Cerdic character first appeared, the pattern of doodling changed, and changed dramatically. In a light reverie during an endless committee meeting the pencil lost its focus of attention and drifted gently across the page yielding a muslin of sensitive lines. Faces and places solidified from the mists of aons past. For some days Don wondered what was happening, then the realisation dawned. His pencil, when left to its own devices, was 'automatically' creating line drawings of the situations encountered with Cerdic.

The sketches now began to appear more and more quickly - at the rate of three or four a week. There was never any premeditation - the pencil just took over, as if it had a will and purpose of its own. The drawing had to be almost complete before



Don recognised what it represented. And most of them were of considerable artistic merit - no mean achievement for someone who hitherto could not draw the proverbial two straight lines. Altogether, over a period of nine months nearly 150 drawings were obtained. Most related to Cerdic, but some referred to other characters from regression.

It seems as if the experience of deep trance hypnosis unlocked a latent artistic talent in Don, possibly something to compensate for the focused cut and thrust of his normal daily activity. These implications are discussed further later.

But another latent talent surfaced a little later too. In 1986 Don's commitments had changed and he no longer managed to attend the regular Thursday evening hypnosis meetings. The pattern of automation then changed as well.

In place of the pictures came words - but still seemingly of their own accord. The phrases Don's pencil now scribbled were of a curiously archaic form. It was as though Cerdic wanted to tell his own story. That included his impressions of when 'the voice called Hugh' came to him.

As we witnessed on many occasions, it seemed not to matter where Don started the account - it was always consistent - just as if we were selecting a 'tape' or CD that could be played and replayed at will. The dates and times selected were always the correct ones, though the words were slightly different conversationally.

Don never made any notes of his experiences or the information gained during the hypnosis work - so once again what we are witnessing - at the very least - is one of the incredible attributes of human mind and memory. From Don we obtained a coherent, consistent, historically accurate past existence, details of which we could not trace from any records available to us. So far, they have given nothing to convince us of their reality, but this need not necessarily prove them otherwise.

Cerdic's story was scribbled fast and in an unusual order. The middle portion concerned mainly with Cerdic followed on directly from the automatic drawings. Six months later Don was sitting on a hillside gazing out over the Weald of Kent, when suddenly he felt he 'knew' the story of Cerdic's father Aeltan, and also that of his son Aelric. As with the Cerdic saga, the words came fast and furious. As Don pointed out, there was no time to stop and plot. The events took on a momentum of their own.

They retold at first hand what it may have been like in medieval England as a thegn in the Kingdom of Kent; living with Cerdic and his family, sharing their hopes and fears, seeing with his eyes, hearing with his ears, and working with his hands. Don entitled it 'The Lost Land'. The later typescript was submitted to various publishers without success, and the book has yet to appear in print.

## **Discussion**

### **Checks and Balances**

One of the principal criticisms levelled at work where unusual mental phenomena are exposed is that the subject consciously prepared for the sessions by undertaking deliberate detailed research beforehand. It is theoretically possible Don may have done this, but from personal knowledge of his lifestyle and commitments, 'leisure' or 'spare' moments were extremely few.

Many people are impressed by the spontaneity of subjects' responses. Answers to operators' questions were never just 'yes' or 'no'. Most often additional information came unprompted, amplifying, colouring, adding background and substance.

Assuming no historical research had taken place, the detailed knowledge of the events surrounding the Battle of Hastings was noteworthy. I have remarked previously about dates and their consistency. Perhaps a year after a particular hypnosis session, Don would be taken back to the same date. We would then be treated to the same sequence of events as on the previous occasion - though not word-perfect, of course, as the idea of a tape-recording might imply. And for dates worked regularly, the material is always as fresh as the first time encountered, untainted by Don or Cerdic having seen the outcome of certain events, even earlier in the same session.

Another critical point raised about the employment of modern dates is that medieval man would not have used them. Any specific day would be metered in relation to the major feasts, festivals, or events such as the lambing occurring six weeks after Yuletide. Agreed, but using the modern dating system does seem to act as an index or referencing system.

The reason for this is not hard to find. Many subjects report that under hypnosis,

even in the deepest trance, however 'possessed' by an historical character they may be, there still remains a 'small percentage' of their 'real' selves that acts as observer and translator.

The idea of a translator is often cited as an explanation for another awkward observation. If the historical characters were 'genuine', we might expect Cerdic, for example, to talk to us in an Anglo-Saxon tongue. That he does not (for whatever reason) is attributed to this process of translation. We did of course ask Cerdic several times to speak in his own tongue without translation. Once, with enormous exertion, we were rewarded by a disjointed string of words that sounded remarkably like low German, but unfortunately the performance was not convincing overall.

Rather more so was a congruence I spotted while selecting some of Don's drawings for a lecture presentation. One was drawn in February 1986 and the other some months later. The first relates to Cerdic's home - the 'ham' (see picture below) - in prosperous times; the second was drawn to illustrate the havoc inflicted by ravaging Normans after the Great Battle. Apart from one hut slightly displaced, the two drawings are superimposable. And Don was quite unaware of this consciously until I pointed it out.

A most interesting comment was made by someone entirely unconnected with the project, and who at the time knew nothing of it. Don was at one of his interminable committee meetings one evening, and on account of its length, his sketch had approached the standard of a fully-detailed pencil picture. Suddenly, a colleague sitting beside him pointed at it and exclaimed, 'I know that place - it is where the M20 curves near Wrotham!'

Another researcher, Roger Morgan, reported later he had checked the astronomical situation for the eve of the Battle of Hastings, and indeed a quarter moon should have been evident.

## **Wheat and Chaff**

Researchers used to working in the paranormal field will know it is in the very nature of the material they deal with that there will never be evidence sufficiently complete or compelling to act as reasonable proof of a phenomenon for most critical but objective members of the scientific fraternity. In mediumistic utterances, some key facts may be provided - names, dates, places - but these will most often be dressed up with inconsequential trivia.

This was certainly our experience with several past-life characters, including to an extent Don's Harold Dickenson. The best example in the present series of experiments was observed with Jennifer Harne, a character produced by Don's wife Joan (pseudonym), who had also been trained to be a good deep-trance subject. In the early 1600s she had lived in Corsham, Wiltshire, and in the usual fashion had related information about life of the period. She had sketched a detailed plan of the village, with its houses, pubs, Guildhall and Saint Peter's Church. Again, neither Joan nor Don had visited this area.

A team of about a dozen ASSAP members descended on unsuspecting Corsham one January Sunday entirely confident that nothing of value would be encountered in what we believed to be a relatively modern settlement. We were very surprised to find the historic inner town to be flask-shaped just as Joan had drawn, and it contained many of the same buildings, including the Guildhall, but placed



differently. The Church was actually dedicated to Saint Bartholomew, but one of the two effigies carved prominently over the main entrance was undeniably Peter with his bunch of keys.

One of our number remarked casually that he would not be surprised, the Cosmic Joker being what it is, if we did not find a 'Cross Keys' public house along the road. We did encounter it, but a mile away and within minutes of closing time in the afternoon, but we had a few moments to document some most interesting examples of the Petrine symbolism it contained.

Another gem related by Joan was her naming Charles II as king in 1651, which was when he was proclaimed, although it took until 1660 for this to be universally accepted. We found this out later: at the time of asking, it was meant to be a trick question that initially we thought she had answered wrongly!

## **The ESP Dimension**

While the existence of extrasensory perception has not been demonstrated to the satisfaction of critical scientists, libraries have been filled with anecdotal material which deserves our attention if for no reasons other than psychological ones. I have already referred to the possibility that some part of Don Brown's personality was reading the information about the Battle of Hastings from the history book through my eyes. We decided to undertake what were originally intended to be fairly standard ESP tests, with the target person in deep hypnosis.

Clive Seymour volunteered to be the percipient, and had proudly given me a new set of Zener Cards to be used for the tests. A normal Zener pack contains 20 cards each of cross, circle, square, star and wavy lines. Clive's pack included a recent development where individual symbols had distinctive colours, with the aim of aiding perception. Thanking Clive, and reminding him to report immediately the first image that appeared in his mind, he was hypnotised by another operator. Meanwhile I put the pack of cards decisively in my pocket where they remained for the duration of the tests.

Julie (pseudonym) had elected to be the agent as she had previous demonstrated a good rapport with Clive who was now lying on a low bed at the other end of the darkened room, and separated from Julie by several people. Taking care to avoid any clues or cues in Clive's direction, I took an object from my pocket, handed it to

Julie and told Clive to report the first 'image' that came into his mind.

After some seconds he seemed slightly perplexed and said, 'Hugh, I know this is ridiculous, but the only thing I can see is one of your little blue model Mercedes cars'. He was actually entirely correct, as this is precisely what I had given Julie, but I just made sympathetic noises and invited him to have another try.

Once more, he failed to see any of the card symbols, but reported a green-handled screwdriver. Spot on again, and exhorting him to relax a little more deeply in the hope of being more successful, I handed Julie the third article - my wrist-watch.

Still apologising for his lack of card perception Clive described an expanding chain bracelet. I did not produce any further targets, and Clive's responses then changed to standard Zener card symbols, but with chance expectation results. Afterwards, when I explained what I had done, his reaction was a mixture of elation and the unprintable.

Later we tried to develop the theme by having both agent and percipient hypnotised with their respective support teams in different rooms of the same flat, communication to be attempted at a pre-arranged time. Again some success, with a lot of uncommon material being reported simultaneously by both teams. However, as might be expected and could have been predicted, when we attempted to tighten the experimental conditions to the most rigorous extent .... no results of any evidential value were obtained. Nevertheless we feel it worth reporting these observations, anecdotal as they are, since they may be of benefit to other workers in future.

## **Regressing the Regressed**

An intriguing experiment worthy of note attempted to find out whether past-life characters could themselves be regressed to past existences. Clive was already known to Cerdic as a benevolent character, and when I handed over control to Clive, Cerdic was quite willing to participate in 'an experiment'.

Clive invited him to lie back, close his eyes, and relax ...

'What, ... now?' came the incredulous question, 'But I'll fall off my horse!'

Suppressing laughter at this unexpected spontaneity of context, and making an

appropriate digital gesture to the Cosmic Joker, Clive invited Cerdic to dismount and lie down on the grass verge, and after hypnotic induction, we did reach the un-named Celt, whose information was very much in accord with that already on our records.

## **Range of Theories to Account for the Past Life Experience**

### **Hoax**

The possibility of deliberate hoax should never be neglected. Reasons for perpetration are many; from trying to hoodwink researchers, to seeking publicity or notoriety in reports, books, broadcasts and so on. However, subjects will need to have carried out their historical research very thoroughly indeed to evade the snares laid by experienced hypnotists and interrogators. They would also need to cultivate an unusual degree of spontaneity in responding to questions.

### **Fantasy**

The dividing line between hoax and fantasy is extremely fine. The former involves more deliberate and conscious effort than the latter. Most hypnotists and all psychologists are aware of the imaginative role-playing ability of the subconscious mind, and nowhere is this more apparent than under hypnosis where suggestibility is heightened considerably.

The subject seems only too willing to please the hypnotist by providing an enormous wealth of detail. All too often the majority of the 'evidence' is the product of an enhanced fertile imagination, and it is regrettable that so much of this has been published in the past, quite uncritically, as proof of previous lives. As ever, a rigorous analysis of the material coupled with the most exhaustive historical research will point researchers in the right direction.

### **Cryptomnesia**

Meaning literally 'hidden memory', this is the well-recognised ability for people to retain deep in the recesses of their memories the most mundane and irrelevant snippets of information taken in merely from a passing glance. Books read in childhood, newspapers once skimmed through, adverts ignored on TV; all these provide a reservoir of information for the imagination, in hypnosis, to dredge.

Facts, of which the waking personality would deny all knowledge, are assimilated into a plausible, coherent story. Many quite convincing published accounts of past lives have later been discredited by firm evidence that proved cryptomnesia was responsible. This is probably one of the greatest obstacles our research faces.

## **Multiple Personalities**

Author and researcher Ian Wilson in *'Mind out of Time?'* took a critical look at the whole field of regressive hypnosis, and concluded that the past-life characters are most likely to be members of a family of alternate personalities of the present-day subject. He does not imply that the people are in any way mentally disturbed, although in severe cases of psychosis the alternate personalities can be very distinct with apparently no knowledge of each other, as in the famous report of *'The Three Faces of Eve'*.

## **Ancestral Memories**

Often put forward as a possible explanation, this model suggests that some memories may be handed down from generation to generation through the genetic code. There is no biological evidence for this: indeed the only information known to be transmitted by the genes in chromosomes is a specification for the synthesis of a range of proteins.

Having said this, instinctual information may be passed on in this fashion, but these are pretty basic behavioural patterns common to the species, compared with individual memories from one's ancestors.

Some philosophers and psychologists deny that the entire range of memory has a physical seat within the body, in which case the ancestral memory option becomes a slightly stronger one, philosophically at least. If certain personality traits and characteristics are handed on in family lineage - by whatever mechanism - vestigial memory traces may also in some way be associated with the same process. However, a major objection to this theory is that the chain of succession may be broken by people dying childless.

## **Cosmic Data Bank or Akashic Record**

Persistent in many religions and philosophies is the notion that everything one

says, does, experiences or thinks about, is recorded somewhere. Akasha is a Sanskrit word - literally, a curtain - on which all this is recorded, and which a soul may consult to learn from past mistakes. Then there is the idea of the Big Black Book that will be opened on the Day of Judgement. In modern high-tech parlance such a concept might be expressed as a 'cosmic databank'.

It is almost like suggesting that the total contents of our minds collected during a lifetime is transferred to this databank for long-term storage.

Perhaps a certain combination of the personality elements of a sympathetically tuned hypnotist/subject team might provide a 'key' to certain 'files' within the storage system. The information provided would have been selected or filtered according to the - possibly unconscious - demands of the team. Chunks from different period of history could be similar or linked in some way, thus giving the impression of coming from past lives.

## **Spirit Entities**

Another possibility not to be ignored is that in hypnosis we may be able to communicate with the surviving spirits of once mortal people, who can speak through the mind of the hypnotised subject, in much the same way as is claimed for Spiritualist mediums or sensitives.

In fact mediumistic trance and hypnotic trance are close members of the same family of phenomena, and more detailed comparison would yield intriguing information. During our research we were able to cause a subject to move from one state to the other by providing an appropriate stimulus.

## **Past Lives**

Finally of course there are past lives themselves - the most familiar model of all. Here a 'soul entity', the 'essence' of a living being, is deemed to incarnate in a succession of bodies in turn, and it is memories of these past lives that are being accessed during the regressive hypnosis of the present-day subject.

In the case where the verbal material is of an exceptionally high quality, and intensive historical research has ruled out, in turn, hoaxing, fantasy and cryptomnesia, we are left with a few strong contenders which include the cosmic

data bank, surviving spirits and genuine past lives. Perhaps they are all one and the same, or at least different facets of the same idea.

## **Mixed Models and Overlaps**

The whole problem with models and theories is that no single one can account fully for observations, otherwise we would use stronger terms such as 'explanations' or 'answers'. One profitable way to proceed, at least for the sake of discussion, is not to overlook the possibility that more than one may be invoked - at various times - to account for the material provided by a subject.

Indeed it is probably impossible - save perhaps at the deepest levels of hypnosis - to eliminate fantasy or cryptomnesia completely. But this should not prevent us from evaluating what we consider to be good material.

Taking another parallel with the study of mental mediumship, a sensitive may present some gems of veridical material, but this can be padded out with non-significant chaff. And there have been instances where 'genuine' phenomena have been helped along with a touch of fraud. We must be eternally on our guard to identify elements from several different models that may be mixed together in the same session. But we must also resist the temptation to pronounce that, just because there is some evidence of fantasy, the whole of the material must be dismissed as such.

An embarrassment to the past lives theory is where a subject reveals consistent characters whose lives overlap. In the present research we did not encounter this difficulty to any significant degree, but where it occurs, it could be accounted for by almost any combination of the remaining models.

## **The Fly-Paper Theory**

In most areas of research where we start out with a variety of possible explanations, experience and experiment usually lead to a narrowing down of the field, and a preference emerges for this hypothesis or that. However, in four years of intensive work we failed to find overwhelming evidence for any of our starting models, and in fact had to add another major possibility.

While Wilson may be correct in believing that the past-life characters are alternate

personalities of the present-day individual, there is another powerful variation on this theme. There is possibly within each of us a latent personality which is our unconscious desire and ambition for ourselves. This could lie completely dormant for most of a life-time, but like a fly-paper can draw to itself those facts and experiences gleaned from the vast reservoir of daily exposure, fleshing the skeleton which could pop out as a full character when - as in deep hypnosis - the circumstances are favourable.

A bus-conductor may see himself as a deep-sea explorer, a drudge-ridden housewife as Boadicea, or a company accountant as an engine driver; ambitions denied to each on account of background, upbringing or necessity.

In Don Brown's case we noticed two factors to lend support to this hypothesis. First, four out of the six identifiable past-life characters were deeply involved in belligerent activities; Harry Dickenson in the Great War, John Witherspoon in Belgium, the Cossack Pyetr Uskensi, and of course Cerdic of Wrotham. Second, perhaps it is not coincidental that Don is also a seasoned fighter and campaigner, but these days with words and ideas rather than sword and hand-axe.

A spontaneous off-the-cuff remark made by Don during the debriefing period on the evening of Cerdic's first appearance may be relevant. He said, 'I can feel him wanting to come out.'

## **Acknowledgements**

This paper is the result of an unusual team-effort of researchers. It is not possible to mention individually all the people who have contributed to the research over the years, but the following colleagues deserve special thanks: Harvey Appleby, Margaret Atkins, Geoff Barrass, Michael Bingas, Manfred Cassirer, John Dawes, Alf Fix, John Fraser, Paul Goodman, Val Hope, Sue Laws, Dee Marsh, John Merron, Annice Neville, Lesley Park, Jane and Ron Pepper, Tony Pritchett, Clive Seymour, Sue Seymour, Dave Smith, Tom Smith, Dave Thomas, and Caroline Wise.

Paul Bew carried out much historical research and refined many of the experimental procedures used. His comments on this text have been appreciated, and these observations are incorporated in the discussion. Fellow hypnotists taught me a lot over the years, and I am grateful to David Christie-Murray, David

Lowe, and Angus McHutcheon for comments and contributions to the experimental protocol.



*Pic: The comet.*

# **AUTOMATIC WRITING & GLASTONBURY**

by Chris Huff

**Archaeologists have been known to accept hints from dowzers in recent years. But dabbling in automatic writing to guide an important excavation was considered completely beyond the pale at the turn of the century. But that is exactly what Frederick Bligh Bond did when he excavated at one of the most famous sites in the world.**

On 9 November 1907 Frederick Bligh Bond and his friend John Alleyne began a series of experiments in automatic writing in an attempt to discover more about the remains of Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset. Bond was a member of the Somerset Archaeological Society at the time and was anticipating his later appointment to direct the excavations in May 1908. In addition to an archaeological interest Bond was fascinated by the paranormal. He was a member of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and well acquainted with the then secretary of the society, Everard Fielding, who was to witness some of the experiments. This interest in the paranormal is evident in his narrative, for he and Alleyne had often spoken on the subject of 'the training of the imaginative faculty upon scientific lines and its application to archaeological research'. Alleyne, having experimented successfully beforehand, was believed to possess the skill of automatic writing, and therefore this was the course of psychical research they decided to try. The results were remarkable and encompassed many features and structures of the once great abbey that no longer existed. For the purposes of this article we will concentrate on the revelations concerning the location, description and subsequent excavation of the Edgar Chapel at the extreme east of the Abbey.

Automatic writing is a form of mediumship where the recipient sits with a piece of paper and a writing instrument in an attempt to make contact with the 'spirits on the other side' or a body of discarnate knowledge available for tapping. It was formerly more popular than it is today. The process would appear to be a logical extension of the earliest attempts at communicating via the table-rapping phenomena, made popular by the Fox sisters in America. As the craze for this new form of 'entertainment' crossed the Atlantic, experiments involving two girls surnamed Becquet were being conducted in France at the instigation of Rivail. The girls, having demonstrated some mediumistic ability, were set to devote some time

to automatic writing. The resulting communications were published in 1856, under the pseudonym of Allan Kardec, as 'Le livre des Spirites'. This later became the foundation for French Spiritism and also South American Spiritism.

Communications in the early 1900s, involving a number of automatic writers, seemed to originate from the spirits of Sidgwick, Gurney and Myers, the founders of the SPR, who had stated that if there was life after death they would attempt to communicate. The first of the messages was received through the sister of Rudyard Kipling, a Mrs Holland, and seemed more directed and studied than others that she had received. Later in 1904, Mrs Verrall received similar communications with a specific order to record the bits. Other mediums were also receiving these bits of information, as though the founders of the SPR were deliberately attempting to confound the critics, and dispel any allegations of fraud, by having the message come through a variety of sources who had no contact between them. Much later, around the 1930s, a respected proponent of this form of communication was Geraldine Cummins. An experiment conducted in 1935 at the Three Fingers stones in Co. Cork, which is detailed by Wilson (1981), produced an interesting account of ceremonies supposed to have been conducted at the stones, which comprised dancing and blood sacrifice, and noted that a special ceremony took place at mid-winter.

To conduct experiments in automatic writing, while it is theoretically possible to do so alone, it would seem more common practice to have two or more persons in attendance. One of these is the writer, usually someone who has demonstrated mediumistic ability, while the other asks the questions. The process of writing would appear to flow when the writer dissociates his conscious self from his actions. While aware that they are writing, they are not aware nor in control of what they are writing. In the remarkable experiment at Glastonbury detailed below, Bond notes that, in the last of the sittings, he would ask the question and then read aloud from a novel or entertaining book, which was calculated to divert Alleyne's attention away from the writing. In spite of this diversionary tactic the writing flowed freely and showed no similarity in content to the spoken works.

## **The Glastonbury Experiment**

The first experiment, with Alleyne holding the pencil to the paper and Bond lightly resting his right hand upon that of his friend, was conducted at 4.30 pm in Bond's office. The question was spoken aloud by Bond: 'Can you tell us anything about

Glastonbury?' The response was a line-drawn map of the Abbey's layout. It was unclear and somewhat disjointed but nonetheless defined the cruciform shape associated with an ecclesiastical building. In the centre of the plan was the name of 'Gulielmus Monachus'. At the east end of the plan there was a rectangular building which was not evident in the remains of the Abbey visible above ground. This area was to provide the focus for the investigations. A subsequent drawing by a 'Rolf Monachus' was supposed to have been of St. Mary's Chapel, but this was far more indistinct. Returning to the first drawing, Bond questioned the entities about the chapel to the east of the Abbey and received the information that it was called the Edgar Chapel, built by Abbot Beere. The first session ended after the name of the 'spirit' was revealed as Johannes Bryant, a monk and Lapidator (stonemason), who in a later experiment revealed that he died in 1533.

## **Where was the Edgar Chapel?**

The Edgar Chapel is named as a chapel of the Abbey in Leland's *Itinerary* and from which we are able (as was Bond) to glean the following: 'Abbatte Beere builded Edgares Chapel at the est end of the church, but Abbatte Whiting performed sum part of it.' Willis, in 1866, produced his *Architectural History of Glastonbury Abbey*, which marked the positions of five chapels at the far east of the choir, the central one of which he identified as the Edgar Chapel. A gap in the centre of the east wall of the choir was interpreted as being the entrance to the chapel which he thought continued for a short distance beyond. This idea was conjectured from the earlier writing of Leland, for if the Edgar Chapel had not been a building in its own right it would not have been a likely topic for Leland to comment upon. In contradiction of the interpretation by Willis, a paper by James Parker in 1880 disputed the site of the Edgar Chapel at the east end of the choir. After assessing the evidence for the site of the chapel in great detail, Parker concludes that the arching of the east end of the church, referred to by Leland as the work of Beere and the site of the Edgar Chapel, was not in the choir but in the east end of the nave.

To summarise, Parker makes the confident statement that: 'On the whole, I think it is best left as an open question as to what Abbott Beere built; at least, that the evidence is not sufficient to justify putting Edgar's Chapel at the east end of the choir.' The site of the Edgar Chapel was, in the early 1900s, lost to antiquarians and its position and architectural nature in dispute. Excavations by St. John Hope in 1903/4 were aimed primarily at proving his contention that there were four chapels at the end of the choir, and not five as Willis had postulated. Therefore

these excavations concentrated on looking for the remains of a central wall running east-west from the east wall of the choir, and Hope had trenches cut along the outside of the wall and east-west trenches in the centre of the choir. From these excavations he claimed to have found no evidence whatsoever for any central extension at the east end of the Abbey nor any remains to confirm a central chapel. Instead he postulated that his view of four chapels was correct and even cited some evidence to support this contention.

In 1908, having procured sufficient funds to begin excavations and having gained a licence to excavate in May of that year, Bond set his team to excavate at the east end of the Abbey. Willis, when identifying the area beyond the far wall of the choir as the probable position of the Edgar Chapel, had added a caveat to his text: 'Unfortunately the practice in respect to these ruins until the beginning of this century [the 1800s] and later was always to remove not merely the wrought stones, but also to eradicate the foundations. And although the remains have been for many years protected from this kind of destruction, there is no hope left of recovering any details of plan by excavation.' The position in 1908, as he was about to commence his excavations, was as Bond himself comments: 'It will readily be seen that no prospect of success could reasonably be expected to attend further research by excavation beyond this point.' Of the Edgar Chapel, at the time that Bond was to excavate nothing definite was known about its position, its length, width, number of bays, crypt or stairway.

The following table summarises six crucial predictions derived from the automatic writing (AW) sessions and their accuracy compared to excavations.

<b>1</b>	<u>AW session date:</u> <b>26 November 1907</b>	<u>Subject:</u> <b>Location of Edgar Chapel</b>
<u>Previous knowledge:</u> The Edgar Chapel was lost at the time of the experiments, however Willis places the chapel in the correct position in 1866 but has the dimensions completely wrong.		
<u>Prediction:</u> 'The east end. Seek for the pillars, and the walls at an angle. The foundations are deep.'		

<p><u>Finding:</u> Bond set his excavators to work at the east end of the Choir, certain that here were to be found the remains of the Edgar Chapel. Very soon after the enlargement of his second trench to a distance of seven feet and six inches out from the choir's east wall, a massive wall running north-south was discovered</p>		
2	<p><u>AW session date:</u> 16 June 1908</p>	<p><u>Subject:</u> The chapel crypt &amp; stair</p>
<p><u>Previous knowledge:</u> Nothing was known or recorded prior to the writing.</p>		
<p><u>Prediction:</u> 'The cript is fallen in, but the clay is not the old clay. Clear out the midst thereof, and many fragments be there. The width ye shall find is twenty and seven, and outside, thirty and four, so we remember.' This was signed 'Beere Abbas'.</p>		
<p><u>Finding:</u> The south-east corner of the chapel proved to be the best preserved, having stonework still extant for a height of six feet and six inches above the floor level of the choir. This was described as rough stonework, and it is probable that it was beneath the floor level of the chapel, which Bond postulated could not have been at a level of less than eight feet above that of the choir. Therefore steps leading up from the choir would once have been evident.</p>		
3	<p><u>AW session date:</u> 16 June 1908</p>	<p><u>Subject:</u> The size of the walls and the shape of the chapel</p>
<p><u>Previous knowledge:</u> Nothing was known or recorded prior to the writing.</p>		
<p><u>Prediction:</u> 'Wee laid down seventy and two, but they builded longer, and he who followed made new schemes for a certaine roofe in golde and crimson, very cunning..... Dig east beyond the feathered grasses. There was a passage to the east doore in ye walls to the streete. In the midst it remaineth..' 'The width ye shall find is twenty and seven, and outside, thirty and four, so we remember.' 'Forty and two feet was the hight of ye newe chapelle and yt was ybuttressed with faire buttresses and walls slantwise at ye corners.'</p>		

<p><u>Finding:</u> As the entire plan of the chapel was revealed, its internal measurement was noted as fifty three feet in length by twenty five feet in width. The walls at their foundations were measured to be seven feet thick for the north and south sides and five feet thick for the east and west. The discrepancy between the predicted width of the chapel and that found at the foundations was ascribed by Bond to being the distance which the recessed walls and windows would stand upon their wider foundations. The thick walls were, as Bond asserted, characteristic of the chapel having a heavy stone groined, fan-vaulted roof of the period.</p>		
4	<u>AW session date:</u> 19 February 1908	<u>Subject:</u> The handrail for the stairs
<p><u>Previous knowledge:</u> Nothing was known or recorded prior to the writing.</p>		
<p><u>Prediction:</u> '...and in ye doore was a greate stairway with two windowes on either hand that did rise one above the other of equal height above ye stairway... and ye stairway was divided in ye midst by a grete rail of stone so that they who went upp might not meet with they who came downe ye said stair.'</p>		
<p><u>Finding:</u> In a subsequent excavation near to the site of the chapel the remains of a double handed rail of stone were found in the general rubble.</p>		
5	<u>AW session date:</u> 19 February 1908	<u>Subject:</u> Decoration inside the chapel.
<p><u>Previous knowledge:</u> Nothing was known or recorded prior to the writing.</p>		
<p><u>Prediction:</u> 'And beyond rose a capella of Edgar ye sainte, faire and high with grete windowes and transhomes and between ye windowes were pillars as panellae the whyche did holde ye rooffe of stone vaultid very faire in panellae which were fanwise very fine much like carven yvorie and carvings y painted in ye bosses and in ye spandrels and there was a grete windowe in ye este parte of eight lights all ye arches and ye rooffe being flatte as of the period and the chamber was yflagged with tiles of many colours and in ye midst was a tumbre and precious stones and pictures in the panellae over against ye est windowe. And ye chamber was in length seventy feet in four bayes and in width it was thirty and foure.....and the walls were thin and all of faire squared stone and newe carven.'</p>		

<p><u>Finding</u>: Subsequently proven substantially correct by excavation. The description of the chapel having fanned vaulting was proven by remains of these fans and the recovery of a central boss which demonstrated the existence of twelve ribs. The blue (azure) glass in the windows was found in abundance in the trenches of the excavations; interestingly the predominant glass from the abbey tended to be white (clear) and yellow/gold. Many of the stone fragments retained examples of their decoration; as the writing had stated, this was of vermillion and gold leaf among other colours.</p>	
6	<p><u>AW session date</u>: 30 November 1908</p> <p><u>Subject</u>: The Polygonal end of the chapel</p>
<p><u>Previous knowledge</u>: No evidence before excavation to suggest that this may have been a feature of the building.</p>	
<p><u>Prediction</u>: ' The ending of the chappel was at an angle, the sides makyng as it were a bay in the east wall there..... In the three faces of the east wall were three windowes, and all this was made faire by Abbott Whitting, who lengthened Edgar's Chappel somewhat, to the extent of half a bay.'</p>	
<p><u>Finding</u>: During the Christmas holidays in 1908, Bond revisited this area and noticed a stained patch among the clay at a much higher level than the footings that he had discovered earlier in the year. When the face of the clay bank was cut back for some two feet the remains of a wall were discovered. This new wall was noted to start on the line of the southern return buttress, angled at 67 degrees to the north-east. Conjecturing that he had discovered the angled ending of the chapel, Bond excavated at the corresponding position on the north side and found a foundation trench in the clay which was filled with sixteenth century debris. The dating of this foundation rubble was a clear indication that he was onto the apsidal building added to the existing chapel by Abbot Whitting before the dissolution of the Abbey by Henry VIII.</p>	

## The Excavations

The massive wall Bond found in his excavations extended for a total width of thirty-one feet and six inches and was five feet thick. Having found the west end of the Edgar Chapel, Bond and Alleyne had an automatic writing session prior to excavating further to the east to determine the overall length of the building.

Upon returning to the excavation, and having cleared the north and south walls for a distance of five or six feet, where opposing buttresses were found, he concentrated the excavation on the southern wall of the chapel. At a distance of twelve feet and six inches from the first buttress a second buttress was found. Eventually the number of buttresses in the south wall totalled five before the wall turned, meaning that the Edgar Chapel had four distinct bays each measuring twelve feet and six inches. Of the excavated rubble found in the trenches, many pieces of moulded stonework and window glass of the sixteenth century were found.

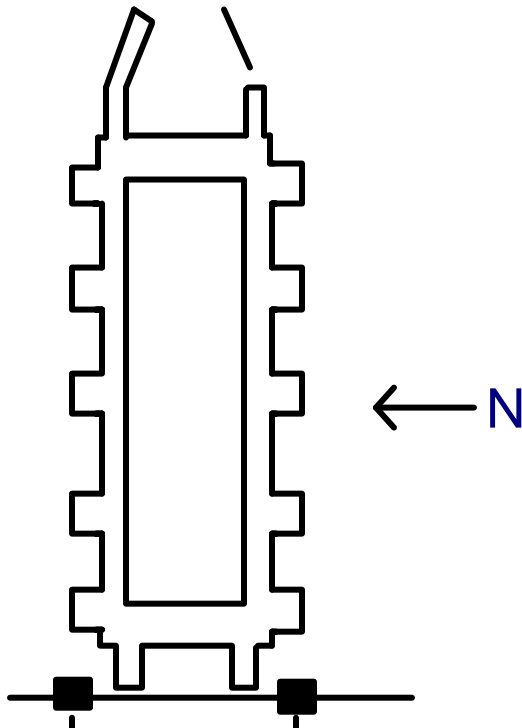
Bond later discovered a wall at a pronounced angle to the others. It was discovered that the wall did not connect with an east wall, stopping short of the point where the two walls should join. Bond conjectured that this was evidence for a doorway into the chapel from the outside, based largely upon a communication received on the very first attempt with automatic writing (*Portus introitus post reredos*) rather than on any significant surviving archaeological evidence. Bond compared the apsidal extension to that to be found at the church at Westbury-on-Trym in Bristol, and thought that the extension at Glastonbury was used as a relic chamber. The revised plan of the Abbey, including the apsidally ended Edgar Chapel, was published in the 1909 volume of the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. Further excavations, outside the scope of this present article, revealed more details of the Abbey at Glastonbury, including the Loretto Chapel.

## **Analysis**

In analysing the scripts produced by Bond and Alleyne, one becomes increasingly aware of the amount of detail about the structure and decoration of the Abbey that is forthcoming, much of which cannot have been known to the pair before excavations started at the site. Where fore-knowledge of the site is demonstrated, Bond is at pains to note these sources in the text, especially in his summation of the passages and the results of excavation. Bond had nothing to gain from publishing his scripts and everything to lose by doing so, and therefore they are a remarkable testament to his belief in their integrity.

From the analysis of the scripts and plans from the automatic writing sessions, when compared with the existing knowledge of the Edgar Chapel and the subsequent archaeological excavations, it is obvious that more than random chance as a driving force is at work. Too many details revealed in the writings

were proven to be substantially correct by excavation, and the observation of proceedings by the secretary of the SPR negates any claim of fraud and dishonesty. The fact that Bond and Alleyne had nothing to gain from disclosure of the experiments lends further credibility and integrity to their work. It is clear throughout that Bond implicitly believed the information that he was receiving, and that much of the information could not have been obtained from conventional sources.



Simplified plan of the Edgar Chapel (not to scale)

## Conclusion

Having conducted these experiments in automatic writing and kept them separate from the published archaeological discoveries at the Abbey, Bond finally released them in his book *'The Gate of Remembrance'* in February 1918. In the preface a note by Sir William Barrett F.R.S. stated almost prophetically: 'Nor must we omit to recognise the courage shown by Mr Bligh Bond in the publication of a work which might possibly jeopardise the high reputation he enjoys.' Bond's employers, the Church of England, who had at the start of this century a very dim view of any communications with the deceased, promptly acted to dissociate themselves from Bond. In 1921, instead of directing the excavations which the church had been enthusiastic about, Bond was employed in post-excavation work - cleaning and cataloguing his finds. In 1922 all excavations at the Abbey ceased and Bond's contract terminated. Bond left England for America where he lectured on his excavations and psychic experiences, returning to England in 1936, where he died in 1945.

In a whitewashing exercise the church banned the sale of his books on Glastonbury at the Abbey bookshop and even made him pay for his admission to the Abbey in later life, when as an excavator there it would be customary to give free admission. Wilson (1981) also notes that a group of Americans succeeded in gaining a licence to excavate at Glastonbury which was subsequently revoked when it was discovered that they were associated with Bond. More recently Bond has been vilified once more for his courage in publishing his experiments. In 1993 Rahtz, while commending Bond on the standards of his excavations and publications, which were high when compared with other standards at the time, unfairly accuses him: 'Unfortunately, in spite of these promising beginnings Bond became obsessed by non-scientific theories, concerned with geometry and numbers, which led him to falsify the measurements, and postulate elements of the structure which had never existed.... Worse than this, as the work progressed he claimed to be guided by automatic writing and spirits...'

Had Bond not had the courage of his convictions in the existence of the paranormal, which he maintained until his death, and published his automatic writing experiments, his reputation as an archaeologist would have been secured. By publishing his findings he became a victim of the prejudices from both the religious and scientific communities of a society that still resolutely, in the face of much evidence to the contrary, refuses to acknowledge the existence of the

paranormal.

## Further Reading.

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Rahtz, P., 1993, *English Heritage Book of Glastonbury*, Batsford.

Willis, R., 1866, *Architectural History of Glastonbury Abbey*, Cambridge.

Wilson, C., 1981, *Poltergeist: a study in destructive haunting*, New English Library.

Postscript: Readers may be interested to learn that Andrew Collins quotes Bligh Bond's Glastonbury excavations as an early example of psychic questing. Ed.

# READING & THINKING CRITICALLY

by Jason Braithwaite

**We are bombarded by all sorts of information about the paranormal these days. Some claims to demonstrate paranormal effects while some refutes it. How are we to make any sense of it all?**

A friend of mine (who shall remain nameless!) once sent me a mainstream glossy paranormal magazine, which I am told was very popular at the time. It was certainly not the sort of publication I would purchase at all. My friend knew this and sent it to me knowing it would make me cringe. She was right. She sent it to me because it contained an article addressing near-death experiences, a research interest of mine. The article claimed to cover the evidence and relate the research in an unbiased matter. In my opinion, it failed. Not only were the arguments and counter arguments shallow, but the article actually proclaimed that the evidence now exists to support an afterlife hypothesis.

The article indirectly relied primarily on near death research for its evidence. I personally felt that it set research back about 25 years. I disagreed totally not just with the conclusion drawn, but also with the whole method used for evaluation and presentation. My anger was directed at the poor attempts to cover the arguments, the sensationalist presentation and the very real attempts to mislead readers into arriving at a conclusion that they knew would keep their subscribers happy, irrespective of accuracy. Furthermore, such publications have a far wider readership than academic or serious paranormal journals and thus have more influence within the area of 'general public interest'. This means that the damage caused by one pretty bad article to those of us who take their work seriously (in terms of public perceptions of what it is that we do) is tremendous and years of hard work can be seriously undermined. If the author of this piece had been a scientific researcher and not a journalist, he would have been expected by his peers to justify his claims, and rightly so!

The episode prompted me to write this article. The aim of this piece is to provide researchers with the intellectual tools they need to assess such articles. The technique involves 'thinking critically'.

## Thinking Critically

Thinking critically can be applied in a variety of situations. It can be applied in a 'passive' sense when analysing other people's work. It can also be applied in an 'active' way in deciding how to go about paranormal research and investigations. Being able to think critically is the researcher's most useful tool. It should help you focus your efforts in more productive ways. Yet it is also tremendously difficult and can at first seem artificial to many people. This article is going to concentrate on the passive methods.

Distinguishing between active and passive critical thinking is not a straightforward matter. In fact, such a distinction may be inappropriate as each is to some degree dependent on the other. In the active sense there are many approaches used within science; the empirical method, various deductive approaches, the who, what, why, where, and so on. While all are relevant, these somewhat institutionalised techniques are no substitute for your own mental reasoning. They are simply a framework, a method to help you gain reliable, valid data. But what happens with this data once you have it? It needs interpretation. This is the point at which passive critical thinking comes in.

There are two very broad distinctions that we now need to make which will help you in your evaluations. We need to look at what is being said or claimed, and also how it is being said or claimed. It is here that we hit our first problem, which is particularly relevant to parapsychology. Often we are not given enough actual 'evidence' to critically evaluate it. When more information is provided, poorly defined research methods and data often hamper our attempts to evaluate the claims.

Researchers sympathetic to the paranormal often see such objections as a bit of a 'cop out' on the part of us sceptical researchers. Sceptics often claim that reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from the research as presented, as the data are too vague or the protocol too loose. I have yet to see any instance where such claims were made that were not valid. Yet sympathetic researchers often see this as sceptics not wanting to admit the paranormal implications. When researchers claim that a satisfactory conclusion cannot be drawn it is not because such conclusions would challenge their stance, rather the conclusions cannot be reliably inferred from the study, due to some kind of flaw.

What we need to do here is not look at what is being said in order to see which conclusion we prefer, but look at how it is being said and see if the counter arguments really do have any basis. You may agree with the counter arguments, but may still think the study is valid. The point is, without knowing exactly how to evaluate rather complex situations, it becomes easy to accept the argument that simply 'sounds right' to you. This is not scientific, to say the least. I have used this rather over simplistic (sympathetic/sceptic) argument to show that critical thinking itself is not independent of the subject matter and the methods used to gather it!

## **Researcher's Aims and Conclusions**

As I said earlier, critical analysis can occur at different levels, and I will attempt a very quick outline here. Firstly we need to ask what the nature of the research is? There are two main types, ie proof- and process-orientated. Proof-orientated seeks to establish that the phenomena being investigated actually exist. Process-orientated seeks to understand how they might work. There are some important points to be made. Often conclusions are drawn from proof-orientated studies that are in reality an attempt to explain the mechanism behind the subject matter. Generally speaking, such conclusions cannot be supported by this approach. To illustrate this, let us consider ESP research and the work of J.B. Rhine.

Rhine was one of the first to try to approach psychical research experimentally and he is often regarded as the 'father' of modern parapsychology. His entire work is nearly all proof-orientated (although there are exceptions). There are, of course, justifiable reasons for this. He was one of the first to tackle the problem, little had been established so he needed to see if such phenomena actually existed in the first place. Also he needed to define many aspects of the phenomena and experimental design before perhaps a process-orientated approach could be used. Why then, in conclusion, did Rhine and his associates attempt so-called theories for the supernatural operation of ESP? Such theories were certainly beyond validation from his experiments alone. It is a point often largely overlooked, and I use it here as an illustration of conclusions being proposed that the study cannot support, whether or not you accept the demonstration of ESP.

Rhine tried to show that ESP existed by running thousands of experiments and statistical tests. Few experiments, if any, at that time (and for a good while afterwards) addressed legitimately what ESP was and how it operated. Even fewer

attempted a non-paranormal interpretation. These questions are really within the domain of process orientated research, trying to look at the operation of the phenomena and understand what is going on, however complex it may be. It is worth pointing out here that process-orientated approaches are often much more complex, demanding and, in my opinion, rewarding. The overall message here is that once you have spotted what general approach has been used (say when you are reviewing someone else's research) make sure that the conclusions are in line with it, as quite often they are not! Applying this analysis requires little engagement with what is actually being said, but more with how it is being said.

## **Research Methods**

Researchers have a massive arsenal of methods that can be used. Deciding which suits the phenomena is a matter for debate. What is important here are the applications and limitations of each method and how these can affect the nature of the conclusions of any research.

Research methods, their choice, application and interpretation are an area of constant theoretical debate. The methods available are far too numerous to cover here. What is important is that the method used in the study you are reviewing is a valid one, that does what it claims to do and is applied properly, and that the interpretations are in line with the method. For instance, I have read many investigation reports that adopt a correlational technique. Nothing wrong with that. Yet the conclusions drawn are often proof-orientated, sometimes even attempting process interpretations. A correlational study is not capable of either in most, if not all, cases. As an example consider epidemiology. This is the study of the geographical spread of diseases. If clusters of leukaemia cases are found around nuclear plants, a correlation can be said to have been found. However, as epidemiologists are at pains to point out, the research cannot say exactly how the diseases were contracted or even if they are caused by the plants.

There are similar limitations in other areas. Should one use a qualitative or quantitative method? Case studies or study groups? What about questionnaires and surveys? What of experimentation and field studies? These topics are beyond the scope of this article, and I list them purely because they illustrate the concerns you must address when critically reviewing the work of others or considering your own research. I would advise members who are interested to read any good text on research methods addressing the social sciences.

Developing your critical thinking techniques will not help you evaluate just research, but also whether any criticisms made are valid. Sceptics are not clutching at straws when they highlight problems of methodology. Research methods are fundamental to the reliability and validity of your work and the work of others that you may review. Finally, we will turn our attention to analysing the actual content of research. Because there are so many possible scenarios to illustrate, the points I have opted to list here are just some of the central concerns you need consider. So, if you are happy with the study, having applied all the analyses so far discussed, you can continue with the following. This is concerned more with what is being said rather than how is it being said.

- ! What was the aim of the study?
- ! Was it claimed to be a success?
- ! Does it support any prior research? If not, why?
- ! What is the nature of the evidence?
- ! Were any problems acknowledged in the research that might have a bearing on the interpretation (such as a small sample, etc)?
- ! Can the evidence be interpreted in any other way?
- ! Does this research look at a different area or have a different starting point to those it claims to replicate?
- ! Logically, what predictions can we make from these findings?
- ! Are such predictions supported in the literature?
- ! Could the research question have been better stated and addressed?
- ! Is the conclusion in line with the research methods used in the study?
- ! Is there any aspect you believe could have affected the results other than those that the study addresses?

These questions can actually be applied to both what is being said and how it is said. Quite often the situation and context will dictate. Finally, for me, half the battle is about asking the right questions. Asking them is often as uncomfortable for researchers as answering them is difficult.