

# ANOMALY

Journal of the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena

Number 28

May 2001

ANOMALY is published twice a year. It is free to members. Single copies can be bought by non-members at £2.50 (including postage and packing - see last page for address details). PLEASE NOTE that the names of witnesses and places have been changed in line with ASSAP's Code of Conduct. The views expressed by individual authors are their own. ASSAP has no corporate views.

© ASSAP 2001  
ISSN 0969-7713

Editorial Team: Maurice Townsend and Valerie Hope. Production: Vicky Knowles.  
Front Cover Illustration: Andy Norfolk. Printed by March Press.

ASSAP is a registered charity (number 20702) and a company limited by guarantee.

Web site: [www.assap.org](http://www.assap.org)

Phone enquiries: 01373-451777

## CONTENTS

<b>Twenty Years of ...</b> <i>by various authors</i>	<b>2</b>
<b>... ASSAP</b>	<b>30</b>

*This is a special issue of Anomaly in honour of ASSAP's twenty years of existence.*

# Twenty Years of...

**Much evidence for the paranormal is dismissed as of no value because it is anecdotal. In this twentieth anniversary issue of *Anomaly* we intend to take a shamelessly anecdotal look at the history of ASSAP.**

Various members have contributed some of their memories about ASSAP to this special article. It represents some of the history of the association that will never appear in the newsletter.

## **Adam Bailey**

### *Notes*

Just after I joined ASSAP, I was invited along to one of my first vigils with a local group, the South-East London Paranormal Research Group. The building was allegedly the source of some rather busy poltergeist activity, and I was quite nervous as to what was to be expected. I'd never encountered a poltergeist before. I met the other members of the group and was teamed up with Andrew Bathie, a psychologist with a good sense of humour.

The night wore on and at about 2.30am Andrew and I were sitting in a small room that apparently was a location in which the poltergeist would make itself known. I was getting tired by this point and I was wondering if I would stay awake. In the imposed complete silence, my hands starting to numb from the cold (the central heating had gone off about 4 hours earlier!). I looked at Andrew and he made a facial expression as if to say 'what next?' I picked up a pen and paper and scribbled 'Not very reliable these quantum singularities, are they?!', holding it up for Andrew to see. Andrew grinned and silently picked up his own pad to reply, 'Think it had the right address?' In cold-numbered scrawl, the

messages continued, 'Dial out for pizza?' to which came the reply, 'Think that would get messy with a poltergeist?!?!' Again, 'See anything good on TV last night?!

Our silent paper communiques continued for the rest of the session and not only helped to pass the time but also relieved the tense atmosphere that ghostwatching can sometimes create. And I made a new friend in the process.

## **Andrew Homer**

*Fools rush in . . .*

Our local group doesn't normally investigate UFO sightings, but every so often a case comes along that seems so incredible that it just has to be followed up. This was just such a case. The report from the witness stated that on clear nights a large mother ship would appear in the sky and proceed to release what she described as 'scout' ships. Occasionally these landed and the occupants could be seen using bright lights in the valley where the witness lived. The location of all this activity was a very sparsely populated hilly area deep in the countryside. The witness sounded genuine on the phone and she was absolutely adamant that these events could be witnessed on any clear night. It just had to be investigated further.

It was nearly a week later before we had a suitably clear night and duly made the long journey to investigate the alleged phenomena for ourselves. We had a car full of ASSAP's finest and enough equipment to record any of the reported activity, should it occur. Expectations were high.

The witness's house was one of three or four nearly new properties situated in a remote valley. From the garden at the side of the house there were clear views right along the valley to the hills beyond. A

noticeable feature of the property was a single-track railway line situated literally at the end of the garden. We met the witness when we arrived and proceeded to obtain further details. She turned out to be a retired woman, articulate and well spoken, who had recently exchanged city life for a quiet retirement in the country, where she lived alone apart from her cats. Most of the phenomena had been observed through a double glazed window in the lounge.

Darkness was falling as we arrived and the weather forecast promised a perfectly clear night. During the interview the witness suddenly announced that the mother ship had arrived! Sure enough, through the lounge window a large, bright object was clearly visible in the sky above the hills. Anyone not used to really dark night skies could easily make the mistake of thinking Sirius, the Dog Star, was an alien mother ship and anyway, we still had the 'scout' ships and the ground activity to look out for. We were not unduly perturbed.

We set up in the garden at the side of the house well away from what little light pollution there was. Our equipment included various still cameras and a tripod-mounted low light level infra-red video camera with which to record the eagerly anticipated events. We didn't have long to wait. The 'scout' ships soon put in an appearance. We never did determine exactly which airport the passenger jets were flying to and from, but the flight path was certainly a busy one with planes somewhere in the sky virtually all the time. Very often the sound from these high-flying aircraft couldn't be heard down in the valley, and they passed overhead brightly lit but silent. Never mind, we still had the low altitude lights to investigate, so after a coffee we soldiered on.

We didn't have long to wait. Bright aerial lights lower than the surrounding hills were observed around midnight but unfortunately accompanied by the low, deep drone of a heavy

transport aircraft. We could only surmise what the plane was doing, but given that the SAS were rumoured to train in the area this seemed to be a pretty good bet. We realised that from the witness's point of view inside the house she probably couldn't hear all this aerial activity outside!

By about 2.00am our earlier enthusiasm was waning fast. After standing outside in the cold for most of the night looking at stars and aeroplanes, we were thinking that things could hardly get much worse. That's when the police arrived. Of course, our witness had long since locked up and gone to bed, leaving us to it in the garden. As the police car drew up the single occupant proceeded to lean across the front seat and wind down the passenger window. He stared at our little group and we stared back with thoughts of 'how are we going to explain this down the station' and 'they'll never believe we're looking for UFOs'. Unbelievably, he eventually wound the window up again and drove off! He must have realised we were ASSAP accredited.

After congratulating ourselves on evading arrest and drinking yet another coffee we decided we might as well carry on in the hope of seeing some of the ground level lights which still hadn't been satisfactorily explained. We didn't have long to wait. We became aware of a small yellow glow moving slowly from side to side far in the distance. We watched this light for a few minutes and realised that it was moving towards us. After a while the light was accompanied by clattering sound, which got louder and louder as whatever it was approached. We stood mesmerised by all this activity, and the sight which eventually greeted us is one that none of us will ever forget. What came into view was a diesel engine on the single-track railway. But this was no ordinary diesel. All the metal panels around the locomotive had been removed so it was virtually a skeleton. In addition to this the whole thing was bathed in a bright yellow light showing all the inner workings of the

engine. We watched this bizarre spectacle go by in utter amazement. It was only after it had disappeared into the distance we realised that with all the equipment we had ready to record the UFOs none of us had thought to take a photograph of the skeleton diesel! ASSAP's finest indeed.

### *Paws for thought*

A local public house has been the subject of a quite successful on-going investigation by our local ASSAP group for some years. On one particular occasion, as we were waiting for the pub to clear at closing time, we were chatting to the landlord and finding out what, if anything, had gone on since our last visit. The landlord started to relate a tale about some carpet fitters who had been doing some work in one of the bars. These carpet fitters had mentioned that they thought the pub was haunted by a cat. Interrupting the tale, we proceeded to say that the carpet fitters had surely only seen the pub's black cat who was usually to be found sleeping in the Solar Bar, reputedly the most haunted part of the pub. At this the landlord became quite indignant and declared that there were certainly no cats in his pub because it was also a restaurant and food hygiene regulations would not allow it. Other members of our group were asked about the big black cat in the Solar Bar and some had seen it regularly and others had never seen it at all. After this the cat was never seen again in any part of the pub. The curious thing is that none of us had ever tried to stroke the mysterious moggie!

## Valerie Hope

### *A quiet night in*

I'm in the unusual position of having attended about ten Investigator Training Courses and never quite become an investigator. Don't get me wrong - I think going out investigating cases and helping to build up a stock of evidence is worthwhile. I enjoy reading the reports that we summarize in *Anomaly*, seeing our training being put to good use. But the one thing they never mention in the investigation reports is the cold. Of course, you'll see plenty of references to cold spots and temperature drops, but these are usually isolated areas in an otherwise warm room, or rapid falls from an acceptable temperature to another only slightly less acceptable temperature.

Ambient temperature takes on a new meaning during investigations. I spent the night locked down in Chislehurst Caves back in the late 1980s as part of Clive Seymour's Project Minotaur investigation of the Chislehurst area and cave complex. I (and the rest of the team) survived an uncomfortable night, emerging a little bedraggled but very, very damp next morning. That was nothing. Little prepared me for the Northern Group's mammoth project in a northern castle (see 'Northern Blanket', *ASSAP News No. 59*).

Maurice Townsend and I committed ourselves to a two-night stay as part of Jason Braithwaite's expanded team. The local members had got in supplies to help us through the night, but the rounds of coffee weren't enough to stop the chill getting through to the bones. Thermometers of various designs had been blutacked and otherwise distributed throughout the suite of allegedly haunted rooms. At regular intervals team members checked the display and noted the temperature, looking for temperature drops and other anomalies. I'd challenge anyone to come up with evidence of

anomalous chills when the ambient temperature is 5 - 6 degrees Celsius. That's the recommended setting for a domestic fridge.

And so I reluctantly decided that, maybe, investigations weren't my thing. I'd much rather have a quiet night in dealing with my ASSAP filing.

### *A flash of PK at the UnConvention*

Have you ever seen PK? No, not the Nina Kulagina film where, with a few hand passes over a table top, she manages to move a number of small objects for a relatively sustained length of time. What I mean is PK in the flesh, right in front of you.

Our Chairman, Phil Walton, has an amazing array of knick-knacks in his possession and an inventor's skill for devising valid experiments using them. If you've been along to the Fortean Times UnConvention you'll have seen a few of his devices. We've never had enough space in *ASSAP News* to show them all, but you may have seen the maps used for dowsing, the spiders' webs of cables, also for dowsing, the cork-lined troughs for the dice-throwing experiments and the low-budget psychic pinball machine. The one that I, in all honesty, expected to produce nothing but negative scores was the jeweller's scales, set out of reach within a glass-sided box. The pans were finely balanced and, if there was a heavy footfall nearby or someone jolted the table, all that happened was that they swung slowly back and forth until they gradually righted themselves. Nothing but an increase in the weight in either pan relative to the other would cause them to move up and down.

ASSAP members acted as volunteers at the UnConvention, manning our stands and helping collate data. At stake that year was the Fortean Times Champion Psychic Award, a rather tasteful resin polyhedron to be given to the person who amassed the greatest

number of points in our 10-test marathon. Lesser prizes of an ASSAP t-shirt and a year's free membership were being offered to anyone who could shift the scales using their PK skills. It was my duty to monitor the scales.

Most of the experiments necessarily had small runs, as the visitor throughput was large and we had to keep them moving from stand to stand. This meant that a high score in a mental test was not statistically significant - there were too few trials being carried out for anything but entertaining data to be collected and chance couldn't be ruled out. Except in something as physical as PK. Everyone in the room knew something unusual had happened when they heard my shriek. A young woman had sat down in front of the scales and asked what she should do. I'd been on the stand for several hours and had got explaining what it was all about down to a fine art by then. I finished my bit, she turned away to look at the scales, and the pans moved. Smoothly, one rose and the other dropped. Not very far, but far enough and for long enough for me not to be mistaken. 'Is that it?' she asked, surprisingly calmly.

I had to make a few subtle changes to my explanations after that. It turned out to be a memorable day - less than an hour later the feat was repeated, by another young woman, experienced equally calmly by her. Even I managed to control myself then. Next day and in subsequent years, colleagues were rather more keen to take over that stand while I went for a break, but no one has since managed to make the scales move.

## Michael Lewis

### *The Man from Tel Aviv*

During my time as NIC, I was the recipient of many strange phone calls. Members of my family complained bitterly that callers would unburden their problems to them in the belief that they were addressing my secretary. In vain did they protest that they knew nothing at all about parapsychology!

One such call was from an Israeli gentleman in Tel Aviv. Disconsolate at the loss of his wife, he sought a medium who could materialise his late spouse. Explaining that such mediums were a rarity, and that no guarantees could be given, I attempted to field the question by giving the name of the only materialisation medium I knew. Thinking no further about the matter, I was surprised to receive another telephone call from Tel Aviv. How, the Israeli gentleman asked, did one get from Tel Aviv to Wiltshire, where the medium in question lived? Taking a deep breath and thinking quickly, I launched into a long travelogue which culminated in changing buses at Marlborough, at the end of which I was sure I would hear no more of the matter. Who, after all, would fly from the Middle East to travel across Wiltshire by bus?

Imagine my surprise when I got back from work one day, to be confronted by my son in a state of high indignation. He had answered the telephone, only to receive an ear bashing from a woman in Wiltshire. It appeared she had answered a knock on her door and found herself faced by an excited Israeli who wanted her to produce his dead wife. On enquiring how he managed the feat of finding his way from Tel Aviv to her country retreat, she was told that a helpful chap from ASSAP had given him precise directions. In vain did my son try to get a word in edgeways to explain that it was his father that she wanted, as the torrent of

righteous indignation flowed forth. She had, it appeared, had some difficulty in ridding herself of the unwanted intrusion. Eventually my son, aggrieved by the invective he had received through no fault of his own, managed to convey that she should ring back when I was at home. 'I'm not in if she rings', I told my son. She never did.

### *The Reiki Master*

Having decided that it was time to get some hands-on experience of what was then all the rage, I booked onto a Reiki (Part 1) Course, having taken some pains to assure myself of the credentials of the Reiki Master (RM) in charge of the course.

Thus it was that I found myself outside a modest council house in Surrey (yes, there are some in Surrey!). The first problem was to locate a bell or knocker, but as I looked at the door, it was suddenly opened by the RM himself. Other participants arrived, and we settled down for an introductory talk. At lunchtime all the participants decided to take a stroll in the sunshine. On our return I realised that I had not heard a bell or knocker when the others had first arrived, and that I still had not located any means of announcing the presence of visitors at the door. Once again, the door was opened by the RM as soon as we reached it. The problem of how to announce our arrival had been resolved, I thought. But had it? Intrigued, I decided to use my parapsychological training to explain how the RM apparently knew whenever his pupils were at the door. (I should explain that a high hedge hid passers-by from view, and there was no window facing the front path).

The next day I made sure I was the first to arrive and, true to form, the RM opened the door the moment I arrived. Once seated, I observed carefully what happened when each of the four other course participants arrived. The RM assumed his usual seat, facing

away from the windowless back wall. In that position he had no view of callers, indeed it was difficult to see out of the window with any clarity due to net curtains. Every so often he would jump up and open the front door to admit the new arrival. Try as I could, I was unable to work out how he knew when a pupil was at the door. At lunchtime, under the pretext of admiring a set of crystals, I stood in front of the window and assured myself that there was no possibility of seeing any callers unless one parted the curtains and peered out. Sitting in the RM's chair, it was difficult to see anything at all through the curtains, and in that position the line of sight was in the wrong direction, away from the front path. Once again the participants went out for a stroll. Realising by now that something very strange was going on, I made an excuse to return to the house ahead of the others. Approaching it from the window's blind side, I crept up to the front door, which was immediately opened by the RM! I then had the opportunity to observe the arrival of the others. Although I could not discern any sensory cue, the RM who was in his customary chair, once again opened the door as soon as they arrived. It was apparent that the double glazing did not allow the sound of footsteps to penetrate the room.

I was forced to admit defeat, being unable to find any rational explanation. Taken on its own, you may not feel this amounts to very much, but when all the other astounding happenings that weekend are taken into account, I believe it is highly significant. Want to know more? Book yourself onto a Reiki Course and find out for yourself!

### *Christmas Past*

In ASSAP's early days, when activities were centred at what was then the North London Polytechnic in Tufnell Park, I always enjoyed the Christmas party which was held at the Polytechnic through the good offices of Denis Bury. A Christmas dinner was

provided, albeit not always of cordon bleu standards, and the event was usually well supported, as in those days a considerable proportion of active members were located in the Greater London area.

There was usually a lecture on some topical subject, and I recall Marion Sunderland, the mother of Gaynor Sunderland (perhaps the most credible witness ever investigated by BUFORA), holding forth on the treatment of witnesses by investigators, and a most erudite lecture on Madame Blavatsky and the intrigues among the early Theosophists by Vernon Harrison. Lectures were usually followed by some home-produced entertainment, memorable among which was a conjuring display by Alan Cleaver (which did not go entirely according to plan), and a slide show by Lionel Beer. Later, when the Polytechnic realised that there were commercial organisations willing to pay far more than ASSAP could ever afford, the venue changed to Dennis Bury's house in nearby Hornsey, with a buffet replacing the formal dinner. One such party took place on a night of dense, freezing fog, when there were dire warnings not to travel. A group of Barnet members had arranged to travel together in a member's car, but everyone else except the driver and myself chickened out on the night, not wishing to risk a journey in such conditions. However, the two intrepid souls set out, proceeding at 10 m.p.h., the driver following instructions from me as to how near the kerb she was, something which could only be ascertained with any degree of certainty by sticking my head out of the window. Finally arriving at the party, my driver went to meet the others while I fetched drinks. She returned to the kitchen helpless with laughter, as the Chairman, seeing us arrive together, had introduced her as my wife! I was not amused.....

A rather more amusing party at Hornsey featured a visit by an Absentminded Professor who greeted the bemused guests with a farrago of nonsense. Most did not know what to make of this

intrusion, but held back for fear of offending a friend of Dennis.  
Happy Days!

*Not strictly ASSAP days but ...*

The era was the sixties, a time of student unrest, although as a student I was more interested in flying saucers than occupying the Students' Union! At that time Ufology was all about spaceships from Venus, and I found the whole idea hilarious. My curiosity was aroused one day by placards on the University Campus proclaiming a lecture by Herbert W Hayden (I can still recall his name today, although I never heard of him again). Billed as a lecturer in Science at Bristol University, he claimed to have invented an anti-gravity device which he would demonstrate. This, he claimed, was the secret of UFO propulsion.

On the appointed day, I and quite a few others turned up, only to be confronted by a notice informing us that the speaker had cried off at the last moment. Enquiring whether his flying saucer had been grounded by a fault, I was told that he had developed a nose bleed! However, all was not lost, Herbert had arranged another date. As this approached, rumours began to circulate: he would arrive by flying saucer, landing in the park which bordered the University; he was married to a Venutian. On hearing this, some rather cynical students made a few enquiries and found that Bristol University had never heard of this gentleman.

The day dawned, and I decided that it was wiser to get a seat in the Union hall rather than join the throng awaiting the flying saucer in the park. I had seen the large hall filled before, but never on the same scale as that day. Students sat straddled on the edge of the balcony, on the balcony stairs, in the aisles, in the doorways, even around the edge of the platform. This time the speaker did put in an appearance. Immediately he faced sustained heckling. No, he

had never said he was married to a Venutian, and he had arrived by train, not flying saucer. Continuing, he asserted that the Venutians had bases on the other side of the moon which we could not see. When someone pointed out that recent NASA photographs of the dark side of the moon had shown nothing unusual, he scornfully asked if the audience really believed the photographs were genuine. 'YES' yelled several thousand students who then relapsed into helpless laughter. The Chairman finally managed to restore order, but this was not for long, as some students had gained access to the roof void, and at a crucial moment released a mass of balloons with caricatures of little green men and flying saucers painted on them. The audience clapped and cheered, and it took the poor Chairman some time to restore order.

Finally came the moment we had all been waiting for. Brandishing a metal bar, Herbert announced that he would suspend this in the air without any means of support, to demonstrate how flying saucers were able to overcome gravity. Producing a large magnet from inside his coat, he then placed the bar against the magnet, and letting go of the bar, raised the magnet and bar aloft for all to see. 'Oi 'ave succeeded' he exclaimed. The whole hall erupted. Several students ran onto the stage to remonstrate with the lecturer, but most were too busy laughing. This time it took even longer to restore order. Never had I seen such a mass exodus before, but I was nevertheless impressed to see that even after two thirds of the audience had walked out en masse, every seat in the hall was still filled! At this point two engineering students took the stage and produced a brick from under their coats. 'Can you use your device to suspend this in the air?' they challenged. 'Are you asking me to keep a brick in the air with a magnet?', the speaker responded. A resounding 'YES' arose from the hall. Explaining that the electromagnetic fields of a brick were too small for a magnet to work, the speaker carried on, but by then to a much depleted audience.

I often wondered what happened to Herbert, he never surfaced again, and it was many years before I began to take Ufology seriously.

## **Maurice Townsend**

### *The Book*

The original idea was for an ASSAP book. We had had no commercial publications since the 'Evidence For' series. Mentions in other people's books had proved a very useful way of raising the Association's profile and gaining members. So how about a purely ASSAP book? It would be written by ASSAP authors, using ASSAP research material. It would raise our profile yet higher. There was also talk of an ASSAP video, though that has, as yet, come to nothing. The book, however, has appeared in print.

You don't recall it? You should do - it is called the Paranormal Investigators Handbook and is mentioned in most issues of *ASSAP News*. Reading it though, you'd be hard pressed to see the ASSAP connection. So how come?

In the early dealings with the publisher we were advised to drop the idea of using our name in the title. No 'ASSAP Guide to Investigations' then. Though various organisations have their title in publications, it was not to be for us. It seems we were not well-known enough for this to have had a positive effect on sales. Alright we said, you know best.

We started the book anyway. A number of ASSAP authors penned their chapters and two ASSAP Executive members edited the result into what we thought was a reasonably coherent guide to investigating the paranormal. A reader from Iowa later described

it as 'a complete guide to the basics of paranormal investigation', according to the Amazon web site. So it seems we succeeded.

Then the proofs came through. It appears that we were not the final editors at all. Someone else had made a lot of changes after ours. Gone were several cherished sections, including whole case studies. Gone were also all references to ASSAP (except at the very end, where it was given an equal billing with the SPR and BUFORA!) while those to the SPR remained. This excision must have taken a lot of work. All the references to ASSAP were quite legitimate, or so we thought. For instance, we mentioned ASSAP cases, ASSAP investigators, the ASSAP web site, ASSAP research, ASSAP publications etc. All these references were perfectly in context, rather than gratuitous. Not too much to ask to mention ASSAP in an ASSAP book, one might think. They had also thoughtfully added the word 'spirit' several times in the discussion on survival where it had not been before.

The biggest shock came after publication, though. The publishers had omitted to mention the names of all the chapter contributors. Admittedly, this was just a mistake rather than deliberate policy (as in the case of removing references to ASSAP). Nevertheless, it was extremely upsetting for all concerned.

During a subsequent chat with John and Anne Spencer, the well-known authors on subjects paranormal, it seems our experiences were hardly unique. If you are about to try to get a book published then good luck to you. I fear you are going to need it.

### *The Sai Baba Mystery*

In the very early days of ASSAP, I regularly attended seances with a physical medium. Having read about such things in the literature I never realised how rare they were these days. I experienced many

things that, to this day, I believe represented something paranormal, whatever that may be. Unfortunately, by the time ASSAP had got hold of such things as an infra-red video camera, the home circle had gone into abeyance.

I was a member of the Physical Mediumship Research Group (PMRG). I was the only ASSAP member of this small informal group. We had a number of contacts with physical mediums. I never quite worked out how this happened, as they seemed a fairly secretive group of people. We met in the basement of Arthur Koestler's house. I suppose that might have made us the original Koestler Foundation.

We visited Ken Batcheldor, famous for his research on table tilting, in Exeter before he died. He showed us an infra-red video he had made of his table-tilting group experiments. It showed a table tilting so strongly that someone sitting on top slid off. The table quite happily lifted off the ground during these experiments, but never when the camera was recording. He arranged for the camera to be completely invisible and inaudible to the participants and controlled it from a secret switch. However, even though no one else in the room apart from him knew whether the camera was recording or not, the table still refused to do its best tricks on video. Indeed the whole session would dampen down as soon as he activated the secret switch.

I heard, through the PMRG, that shortly before Ken died he was working in a sitter group of two - just him and one other member. In spite of this he was getting some of his best results ever. Was the other group member a physical medium? It was even reported that Ken had seen ectoplasm-like structures in red light during one session. Alas he is no longer around to ask.

Another one of our group's 'field trips' was to a hall in south London where Sai Baba was holding court. Or at least that is what I have always believed until recently. My recent reasons for doubt stem from having been told that Sai Baba has only ever left India once and that was to go to Uganda.

The person in the hall certainly looked like the Sai Baba of the pictures. He produced (not while I was there, but for other members of the group) vibuti or sacred ash. Unfortunately, I never looked into the matter in great detail at the time as I did not realise it was controversial. Maybe the man was a disciple of Sai Baba spreading the word in London. On the other hand, Sai Baba is said, by his followers, to be able to materialise abroad!

I have to admit to being completely confused about the whole episode now. If anyone has any information about who exactly visited London in 1981/2 I would be pleased to hear from them.

### *Wrong Target*

In 1984 we ran a remote viewing experiment. We sent out forms to ASSAP members to be returned with their impressions of where our 'sender', Chris Bratcher, might be. He was doing a sponsored walk from Liverpool to Dorset and so would be at various different locations during the experiment. As an added factor, Chris deliberately handled half the forms before they were sent out. The idea was to see if these forms gave more accurate answers through a sort of psychometric link between the subject and target.

The results were not particularly significant. However, one respondent, Jean Astle was convinced she had 'tuned in' to someone, though the results did not match with where Chris had been. They WERE, however, quite impressive matches on where I, the experimenter, had been on the days concerned! I was working

away from my normal office and very few people knew where I was during those days.

But why should anyone 'tune in' to my whereabouts, rather than those of the intended sender? Well, as experimenter I had, of course, touched ALL the forms before they were sent out. So maybe the psychometric link had worked after all. Another case for the Cosmic Joker perhaps. Incidentally, it would be a great idea to try this experiment again some time.

## **Dennis Bury**

### *The Significant Number*

Some fifteen or so years ago the Survival Joint Research Committee Trust (SJRCT - a group that has worked closely with ASSAP for years) was pursuing one of its earlier interests. This was, the breaking of a code which a deceased person would take with them through the veil of death and then transmit back through mediums in order to perform some verifiable task which would indicate that the code had been broken. The idea was a simple one - that the deceased would actively pursue an objective of transmitting the precise content of the code. Such an experiment would need only one sound instance to be of scientific merit. Replication would then be icing on the cake. The origins of this approach are from time immemorial. However, the general orientation, to check out reliably what the dead could say, was given a great boost by the famous Cross Correspondences Case of the SPR, the dimensions of which are still utterly astonishing even when one manages to work through the complex materials which were involved. I suspect that there was at the time nostalgia at work for the replication of such an exercise as the Cross Correspondences Case. Add to this the knowledge that was just evolving then, derived from computers and encryption, and interest was being rekindled in these tests.

Readers will be familiar with the Thouless Test. The SJRCT had and still has a padlock[s] which can be undone by the revelation of the number (although the experiment is slightly more complex than that).

At that time, we were in contact with a retired Doctor of Jurisprudence from Florida who was giving his entire energy to creating suitable codes. He had set up a Foundation called 'the Survival Research Foundation'. He came to the UK with his wife, doing lectures and seeking interest. He is a brilliant mind and was coming to the conclusion that possibly those with younger brains were the ones who seemed to be able to communicate better, although questions of whether this was due to some non-personal effect or whether it was a function of being 'in Spirit' were unclear since much hypothesising was current then and still is.

Some time after the said Dr Arthur Berger left to return to the USA, having given his lectures (including one to ASSAP), there came a letter in *ASSAP News* where a writer who had been involved in a sitting had had a drop-in communicator and he had said 'tell Arthur tell Arthur' and given a number. The writer in *ASSAP News* had asked it to be published, but the readers didn't get the outcome. This was - that Arthur Berger to whom I sent the item said 'yes, that was my army number bar one digit', ie. one digit wrong. On the strength of this Arthur Berger came over and went to a sitting in Exeter, but, as is often the case with such things, nothing came of it. I alluded to it later on in a letter, and we were only able to wonder - which is what people do about this subject. Arthur had come close to his life's ambition, which was to precisely have replication of a numbered code, and he perhaps had hoped that this was the beginning of something greater.

Of course, the whole episode was part of a wider change of heart which has come about in the SJRCT since. Broadly speaking,

although the SJRCT entertains no specific brief to believe in an afterlife, keeping rather to a merely empirical agenda, the committee would perhaps be said to have adopted a more conciliatory stance to how difficult it must be for a deceased person to communicate. This has resulted in a number of alternative and slightly more 'felt' experiments which are still ongoing. Also, mature reflection makes one wonder whether immaculate 'proof' of survival could lead to abuse - dictators could rid themselves of unwanted people and euthanasia would take on a new dimension.

This instance is interesting to me because it typifies some of the unofficial ways in which the subject progresses. We tend to think of memory as an individual 'brain-box' facility which resides solely in the person. In actual fact, memory is a little more as well and is something which resides in a social community. Like individual memory, it has to be prompted and community events can facilitate that. Like individual memory, although not formalised in scholarly refereed writings, the implications of what is remembered have influences above and beyond the present and exert an influence of some degree, although seldom made explicit and conscious.

## Hugh Pincott

### *Hypnosis*

Much has been talked and written about the impressive hypnosis work undertaken by ASSAP in the mid 1980s. One aspect we looked at was possibly heightened sensitivity in a trance state. Clive Seymour volunteered to be a hypnotised percipient, attempting to read coloured Zener card symbols looked at by an agent at the other end of a large, darkened room, with many people sitting in between. Hugh Pincott chose the target for the agent, confident that nobody else could see it.

Clive seemed perplexed, stating he could see no symbols, but surprisingly, a little blue model car. This was precisely what Hugh had slipped to the agent. Expressing sympathy, Hugh suggested Clive tried again. He did, but reported an expanding watch bracelet and then a green-handled screwdriver. Again, exactly what Hugh had given the agent! Later, Clive's reaction was a mixture of elation and an unprintable exclamation! Naturally, the more we tightened the operating conditions, the less marvellous were the results of similar tests.

Another story concerned our hypnotic regression experiments. We were interested to find out whether 'past-life' characters could themselves be regressed to past existences. Fellow hypnotist Clive Seymour was already known to the Anglo-Saxon character 'Cerdic' as a benevolent person.

When I handed 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!'

This spontaneity of context was always evident in our work, reflecting perhaps on many occasions the Cosmic Joker's presence.

A couple of our subjects developed a talent for drawing under hypnosis. Never having visited Corsham in Wiltshire, Jane Pepper sketched a town plan in the mid 1600s, which bore some resemblance to reality, and included St Peter's Church. Our researchers discovered on the spot that the church was dedicated to St Bartholomew, but one of two large effigies carved prominently over the main entrance was undeniably Peter with his bunch of keys.

One member remarked that, knowing the Cosmic Joker, we should not be surprised to find a 'Cross Keys' pub nearby. We encountered it a mile away, containing some interesting Petrine symbolism.

*The Chairman who disappeared ...*

Most of ASSAP's founding officers still maintain an interest in the subject and the Association. But ASSAP's first chairman, Alan Hughes, could rank as a latter-day Colonel Fawcett - disappearing without trace. Alan is best remembered for his energetic thrust and dynamic enthusiasm, giving the fledgling organisation direction and impetus.

Then just a few years later he left the scene completely - physically and metaphorically. To say he got married is insufficient explanation, for he also threw in his senior, well-paid job to become ... a pop impresario!

*Administration before computers and e-mail*

With desktop PCs an integral part of today's offices and homes, it is hard to imagine how membership management was possible without such facilities. Yet a succession of Membership Secretaries coped valiantly, typing acknowledgement and renewal letters by hand, keeping carbon copies and filing details in a sectioned card-index. Even with just 350 members, Janice Bagnall, Caroline Wise, Sue Laws and Doris Binyon in turn all reckoned the work consumed about three evenings a week.

One of the early pre-occupations was to avoid infiltration of the organisation by mentally unstable people, whose extreme passions could prove embarrassing to a serious, scientific body. Consequently all applications were vetted individually by the whole Executive. In good Civil Service style, the form had to have a reference code attached, which became simply WONF - 'Weed Out Nutters Fast'!

To avoid wasting time between meetings, a prehistoric form of e-mail was employed. Details were dictated on to tape, which was circulated to key people for scrutiny.

### *Home and work truths*

Dennis Bury and Hugh Pincott were talking recently about the early days of ASSAP. Remarking that we seemed then to have much more time for research and similar activities, Dennis wondered whether increasing age might account for this observation. 'Not a bit!', Hugh retorted, 'In those days we both had salaried jobs rather than self-employment!'

## *Skeletal*

A few of ASSAP's earlier cases centred on haunting of deserted buildings, reported by security officers. The very environment - bare, cold and empty - might well be sufficient to induce certain experiences. Several investigators frequently felt uncomfortable, but not John Merron. He would be found wandering nonchalantly alone in the dark, popping from odd corners he had been exploring. He explained that his job as a pipework engineer often required him to inspect dark, skeletal, half-demolished hulks, so he became inured to it.



*John Merron at home on a vigil*

## *The Library*

Quite early on, ASSAP acquired a large collection of books and research material. For a while this was housed in various members' homes, but soon it found a more appropriate home in the comfortable, private basement of Purley Public Library. Member John Rimmer, Chief Librarian there, persuaded the Council's Library Committee - without going into too much detail - that accommodating the reference material of a learned society would be an asset to the Borough!

Our own Library Committee meetings were quite sociable affairs, being held at a pub in Waterloo. Wojtek Gaworewski, Dave Salt, Clive Seymour and Hugh Pincott claim they did a lot of work there too.

When Purley wanted the space in their library back, ASSAP's books had to go temporarily to David Christie Murray's garage. ASSAP's wandering library is now housed at the University of London.

### *Mostyn Gilbert*

Mostyn Gilbert was the scourge of the Society for Psychical Research in the 1970s, creating stormy AGMs in company with the legendary Dr Dingwall. One year Mostyn could not attend, but a lady raised several points, appearing to be critical of the way the chairman, Professor Arthur Ellison, had portrayed Mostyn as an ogre.

'Oh, Madam', Arthur responded with feigned patience, 'You do not know Mr Gilbert as I know Mr Gilbert!'

All of which was rather unfortunate, as the lady was actually Inge - Mostyn's wife!!

In ASSAP's early days, although he kept in the background, Mostyn was extremely generous with hospitality and accommodation for Executive meetings. The latter were held usually at his central London office or his luxury flat in sight of Big Ben, and we were always invited to his professional parties for City types.

### *Charitable status*

How was ASSAP able to gain charitable status, when thousands of other organisations could not? Answer: by engaging a smart lawyer. Charities come in three classes: religious, educational, and for the relief of the poor. The solicitor wrote the company Articles and Memorandum of Association enshrining the detailed educational purpose at every opportunity. It was quite cheap, too, because unfortunately at the final draft stage, the solicitor ceased to practice on account of misdemeanours - of an administrative rather than criminal nature. Thus, though we had made some staged payments, the final bill never arrived.

### **Philip Walton**

#### *Invisible*

The chimney sweeping industry has come on a long way in the last few centuries. The tools of the trade (small boys) have grown up and apart from one noted elderly gentleman who puts in an annual appearance, but with little cleaning effect, brushes seem to have come into favour. I think it is because of the smaller nature of the modern chimney and the decline in fitness of the modern boy that revivals of this method have not caught on.

So it was with some surprise some years ago that people in chimneys turned out to be the solution to a puzzle involving a

reputedly haunted house. The house in question was Jacobean and had not been modernised, so still retained its generous chimneys.

Picture the scene: lights out, several groups of eager investigators spread over the house, when all of a sudden the sound of hard objects hitting a wooden floor made many of us jump. There were investigators at all the doors, no one had entered or left. And yet there was a definite eerie sound coming from the centre of the room. Torches revealed nothing, and people returned to their original places.

When all was quiet again the clever, agile hoaxer returned to the centre of the room via his secret passage, down the chimney! When ready to make his escape, with the correct direction already worked out, another stone would hit the floor and he would pop up without a trace and out of view of the searching torch beams.

Unfortunately for the agile hoaxer, I had been testing out the then latest bit of kit that ASSAP had acquired - a night-vision monocular. The whole strange display had been played out in front of me in a pleasant green hue, and as soon as the vigil session was over I drew attention to the small soot marks on the floor by the chimney and then pointed out the hoaxer in question to eliminate his additions to the night's activity.

So an open warning to our annual crypto visitor. Next Christmas beware and check to see there are no ASSAP Christmas Eve vigils planned before you start your chimney exercises.

# ... ASSAP

## After twenty years, what exactly is ASSAP?

So here we are, twenty years on. And what is this ASSAP we have created? I have thought about this a lot recently. There are many answers, of course, but most of them apply equally to other organisations that either existed before we were formed or have sprung up since. What I was really interested in was the answer to the question, have we made a difference?

I believe the answer is, 'yes'. So why do I believe that? I believe it because I think ASSAP has filled a sort of ecological niche in the coverage provided by paranormal research societies. That niche could be defined as 'active investigation from a neutral standpoint'. When we started there were groups interested in academic parapsychology who rarely touched investigation of the 'raw' phenomena. Those groups that were mainly concerned with such raw phenomena all seemed to have some viewpoint or belief to defend. These viewpoints tended to cluster around either a belief system or a skeptical standpoint. ASSAP, by contrast, has no official views.

ASSAP, then, provides a unique habitat. It is tolerant - the skeptic and believer are both welcome in ASSAP and can debate without rancour. But more than that, it provides a home for that all too rare species, the neutral paranormal investigator. This species of investigator is interested in the truth behind paranormal phenomena, whatever it might be. Even if this truth leads to the end of cherished beliefs. For such people it is better to know the truth than live a convenient lie. It is an unusual viewpoint among paranormal enthusiasts. It is often confused with skepticism, but the two are quite different. It is more like true scepticism where the

truth is only accepted when it has been satisfactorily demonstrated. Until that time, judgement and beliefs are suspended.

I realised the difference between 'skepticism' and 'scepticism' when I attended, with other ASSAP members, a skeptics conference. The extraordinary thing that I noticed was the lack of real scepticism. Odd, you may think, at a skeptics conference. There was plenty of scepticism for things paranormal. However, few people challenged the substance of anything the skeptical speakers said. I could see many obvious holes both in the way they investigated cases (eg. posing leading questions to witnesses to 'suggest' fakery) and the conclusions drawn (eg. alternative explanations were often not satisfactorily eliminated). And yet, not many people at the conference seemed to be bothered about such 'details'.

I think this is because most of the conference attendees shared a common viewpoint. That viewpoint could be roughly expressed as 'since there is no such thing as the paranormal, any normal explanation will do, the exact details being unimportant'. The big thing was to prove, by whatever method seemed appropriate, that nothing 'paranormal' had occurred.

I have also, of course, met a great many convinced 'believers' over the years. By 'believer' I mean someone who takes apparent paranormal phenomena at face value and often invests some meaning or belief in them. I use the word 'apparent' because people who are convinced of the reality of paranormal phenomena often do not view individual incidents very critically. Some of the things they accept as paranormal many of us would see as misperceptions.

Some believers go so far as to accept evidence for their beliefs from decidedly dubious sources. I am referring, of course, to the mysterious 'they'. For instance, 'they' have absolute proof that a UFO crashed at Roswell and that technology taken from it was used

by the US military. Unfortunately the mysterious 'they' are not usually available for interview so we do not know what their evidence is for these and many other claims.

I was once able to examine critically some evidence 'they' had produced. I was at an ASSAP meeting when someone told me about an investigation he had heard about. The case turned out to be ASSAP's own Chislehurst Caves vigil. I was informed about all sorts of fascinating and dramatic phenomena that 'they' claimed had been witnessed on that fateful night. Well, 'they' got it wrong! I was actually there that night and, apart from getting dramatically cold and wet, I don't recall any fantastic phenomena.

The media are sometimes amusing but usually frustrating in their treatment of neutral investigators. Basically they do not understand them. The media have to have an 'angle' (usually either skeptical or credulous but almost always condescending). I find it ironic that organisations that claim to be interested in news (ie. what's new), only seek out tired old clichés and prejudices when it comes to the paranormal. Unfortunately, we need to persist with the media to pursue our great goal of education. Somehow we have to get our message across that there is something here worth investigating and that it has by no means already been satisfactorily explained by either skeptics or believers, whatever the media might think.

So there you have it. ASSAP provides a perfect habitat for that rare, shy, frequently misunderstood but nevertheless valuable species *Investigatorus neutralis*.

The Editor