

ISSUE 141
WINTER 2012

seriously
strange
magazine

Poltergeist?

ALSO INSIDE:

Professional Body update
ASSAP Training & Conferences
The Count of St Germain
The Trouble with Skeptics
What Poltergeist?
A Christmas Ghost Story
Poltergeist? You Decide

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The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena was formed in 1981 to research and education about a wide range of anomalous phenomena.

These fall into the broad categories of psychic phenomena, earth mysteries, Ufology and Fortean phenomena. ASSAP holds no corporate views and the views expressed by individual authors are their own. ASSAP is a registered charity (327422) and a company limited by guarantee (2075226).

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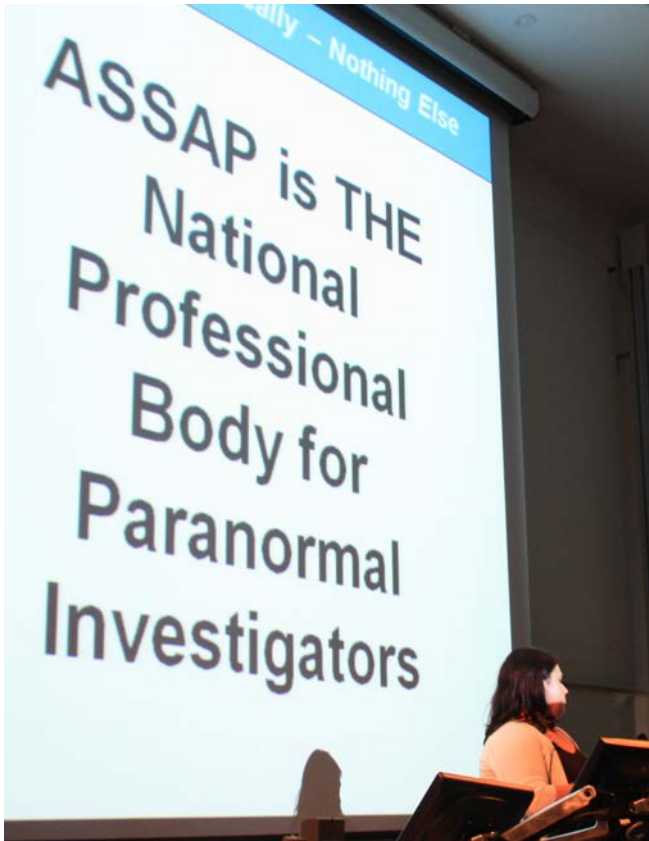
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Professional Body update



National Register of Professional Investigators to be 'Beta Tested' in New Year

The ASSAP Professional Code of Ethics, forming the bedrock of the NRPI, has been consulted on, sent to the government for comment and subject to academic peer-review.

Now that this exhaustive process has been completed, and published in edition 46 of Anomaly, the NRPI is ready for launch.

The process will be beta-tested in the new year - watch out for messages about this - and we hope the full NRPI will be launched along with the next edition of Seriously Strange.

There will be only one Advanced Training Weekend in 2013; don't miss out:

9-10 February 2013 at the Oxenwood Centre, Wiltshire

Costs as per attached booking form

The event is suitable for people who have attended a basic ASSAP Training Weekend and wish to complete their AAI status. It is also suitable for AAIs and those who have attended an Advanced Training Weekend in the past who would like a refresher in best practice.



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seriously unidentified?

ASSAP'S FIRST UFO CONFERENCE

Reporting Back

On 17 November 2012 at University of Worcester over one hundred delegates gathered together for one of the larger dedicated UFO conferences of recent years.

Seriously Unidentified was a conference with a twist, however. Rather than looking at the politics of disclosure or re-examining old cases the conference focused on an honest discussion about the present and future of Ufology.

The event certainly attracted an unprecedented amount of media attention and therefore controversy. Initial news reports took a particular 'angle' and quickly a good portion of the national press and most of the BBC news stations around the country picked up the story.

Ian Ridpath gave a sceptical overview of Ufology while Trystan Swale gave a sceptical overview of crop circles and prominent abductee Sacha Claire Christie discussed her experiences. Paul Vella talked about the relationship between UFOs and the movies whilst Cal Cooper proposed that UFOs and psychical phenomena might be linked. Ufologist Kevin Goodman discussed his long association with the subject whilst John Wickham represented BUFORA.

The day ended with a summit of the speakers with audience participation discussing whether the subject is in terminal decline or whether it could turn a corner in the future. Please refer to the present edition of Anomaly for a fuller report.

THE  **TIMES**
The Sunday Telegraph

**The
Economist**

**THE
Sun**

BBC
RADIO

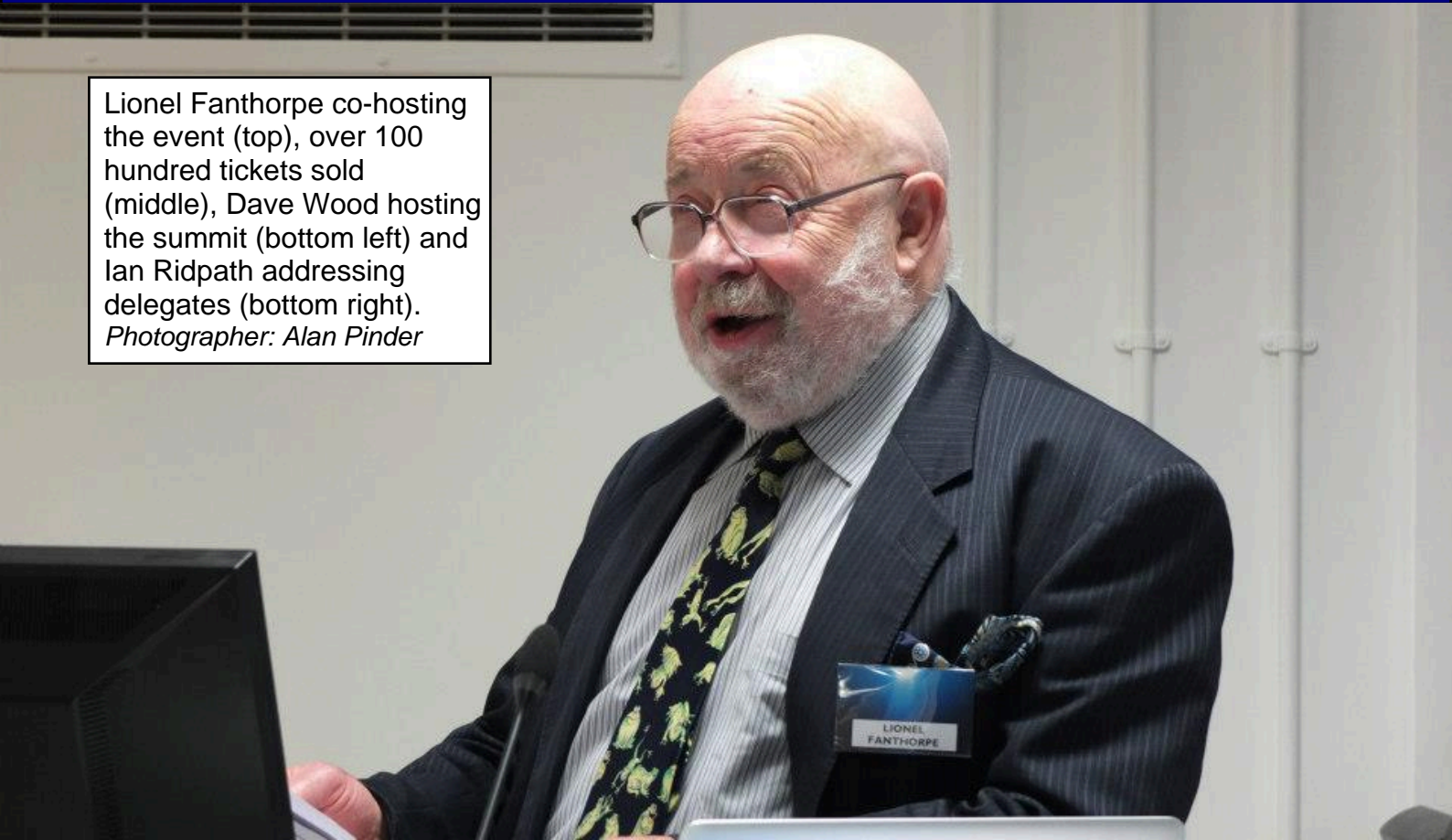
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BBC
RADIO

5 live

THE
HUFFINGTON
POST

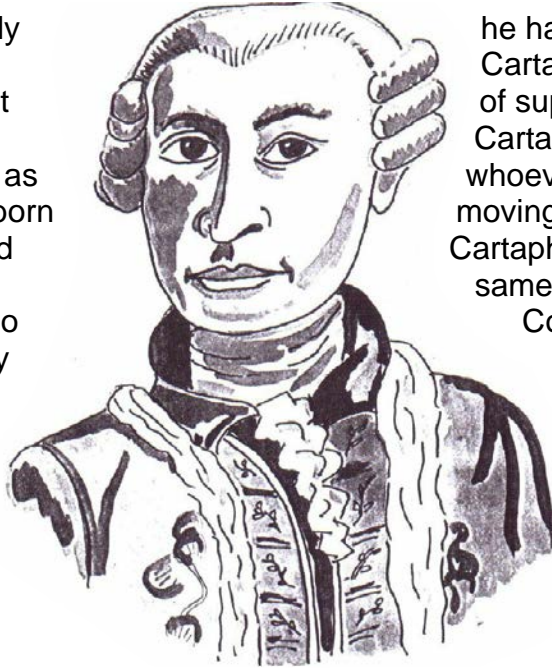
Lionel Fanthorpe co-hosting the event (top), over 100 hundred tickets sold (middle), Dave Wood hosting the summit (bottom left) and Ian Ridpath addressing delegates (bottom right).
Photographer: Alan Pinder



The Count of St Germain

By President and First Lady, Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe

Getting on the trail of the highly mysterious Compte de Saint-Germain starts with the almost equally mysterious Count of Cagliostro – otherwise known as Giuseppe Balsamo. He was born in Sicily on June 2nd 1743 and reportedly departed this life in the Apennine fortress of St Leo on August 26th 1795. He may not have done. Cagliostro claimed to be a medium, a soothsayer, an alchemist, a miracle healer and a prolific producer of what he said were aphrodisiacs and various elixirs of youth and longevity.



he had recently had a meal with Cartaphilus. Various other accounts of supposed meetings with Cartaphilus seemed to indicate that whoever the claimant was he was moving steadily westwards. Did Cartaphilus really exist, and was he the same man who called himself the Count of Saint-Germain?

One of the strangest episodes concerned St Germain's 18th century encounter with an elderly widow, the Countess von Georgy, whose husband had been an ambassador in Venice in 1670. She asked St Germain if his father had been there at the time. He said, "No, my

He also reported that he had met the Count of St Germain who had initiated him into a very strange and elite Masonic order. If, just for once, Cagliostro was telling the truth, his comments about the Count of Saint-Germain are significant.

Nothing for certain is known about St Germain's origins. He could have been the son of Francis II Rakoczi, a Transylvanian Prince, and Rakoczi's first wife. Another theory makes him an illegitimate son of Maria Anna of Pfalz-Neuberg, widow of Charles II of Spain. The most intriguing suggestion is that he was Cartaphilus, the legendary Wandering Jew – and as such nearly 2,000 years old! Such evidence as there is about St Germain seems to place him in the eighteenth century – but his birth and death remain equally mysterious.

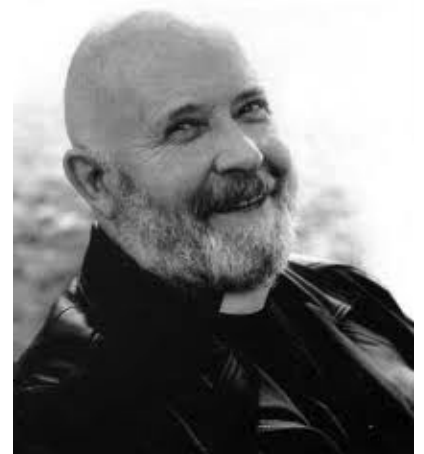
The Cartaphilus story is worth further exploration: in one version of the legend, he was a collaborator working with Pontius Pilate who told Jesus to hurry as he was on his way to Calvary. In another account, he spits at Christ as he journeys to Golgotha. In all versions, Cartaphilus was told that he would live to see Christ's return in glory at the end of the world. In 1228, an Armenian Bishop visiting St Albans claimed that

lady, I was there then myself." The Countess found that incomprehensible – St Germain seemed to her to be the same age (early thirties) as he had looked half a century earlier!

His claims to unimaginable longevity went far back beyond the Christian era: he claimed to have known Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

Before apparently vanishing from history, St Germain was protected by Prince Charles of Hesse-Cassel. Since St Germain's reputed death in 1784, it has always been suspected that Charles used the old, tried and tested espionage ploy of pretending that death had occurred in order to enable an agent to assume a new identity and escape.

An investigation into St Germain in particular and tales of amazing longevity in general would be a very worthwhile piece of ASSAP research.



The Trouble with...

Skeptics

I recently read a post by a skeptical blogger about a national newspaper article featuring ASSAP. The article in question took a particular 'angle' on the story that did not quite tally with reality – not uncommon in the national press! However the skeptic blogger took the article at face value, did not research the background and let loose a personal opinion based on inaccurate evidence based on a single source.

I grabbed a handy (UK) dictionary and looked up 'sceptic' that mentioned 'questioning attitude towards facts' and 'requiring information to be supported by evidence'. The concept of a skeptic accepting media reports at face value without any research struck me as odd. But it's not the first time I've noticed this phenomena.

Interest in paranormal research today seems increasingly polarised by people who are guided by an existing belief in anomalous phenomena and an organised network of people who debunk any claims made by the former. And never the twain shall meet. I know some good skeptics who are actively involved in paranormal research who are belittled by their skeptical colleagues for doing so. Similarly many paranormal investigation groups will reject any person questioning their findings. As such skeptics have recently gained a bad name for being armchair or campaigning debunkers who comment but do not research. Meanwhile the process of investigation itself builds the reputation of being intrinsically belief-orientated and therefore not rational or credible.

Therefore it is hardly surprising, in this polarised and mistrustful community, that many people simply do not know what to

make of ASSAP. In the past year ASSAP has been variously described as shady skeptics, a network of covert believers, brainwashing debunkers, spreaders of government disinformation and a front for MI5 operations.

ASSAP constitutionally has 'no corporate views', meaning we do not have a particular axe to grind. We are fully open-minded and actively stimulate and fund research and investigation whilst, being scientific, tell the world that any extraordinary claims of anomalous phenomena require extraordinary evidence.

ASSAP has members who are skeptical campaigners but love our even-handed approach to education and research. We count amongst our colleagues leading members of the UK skeptical community, the exceptions who do actively research and who do outreach work. Similarly we count amongst our members people with the conviction of belief who leave their preconceptions at the door to do good science.

But from the people I've met at ASSAP conferences and events in recent years we mostly attract people who are genuinely open-minded and undecided, people who genuinely want to learn more and hear both sides of the argument.

Probably like you I'm proud to be part of one of the only major organisations anywhere in the world occupying this important middle position of active but rational and open-minded enquiry. Personally I can't think of anywhere else to be.

**By Dave Wood
ASSAP Chairman**

WHAT POLTERGEIST?

I have personally been witness to seminal and celebrated poltergeist cases and have observed anomalous phenomena consistent with the description of 'poltergeist' cases. But does this term have any use to the scientific investigator?

Poltergeist activity is held to be a syndrome of linked anomalous events, often including the movement of objects, raps and sometimes physical attacks. Over time Poltergeist have been variously described as mischievous or malevolent spirits or demons. Or an inexplicable psychokinetic affect caused by an often unwitting human agent, often a pre-pubescent girl.

Various 'categories' of haunting have been proposed over the decades and often these categories are rooted in folklore. Hauntings may involve non-sentient 'ghosts' in an anniversary style (e.g. the headless horseman riding on such or such a day of the year) or a so-called 'replay' or 'imprint' of a ghost, explained by the stone tape non-theory. Sentient varieties of haunting may involve restless 'spirits' or those linked to a particular place or person. Less common varieties, popular in the early Victorian days of psychical research, including crisis apparitions, general apparitions of the living and veridical (truth speaking) apparitions. None of these categories are useful to the neutral investigator of anomalous phenomena. They all imply an origin which has no basis in reality beyond convention, folklore or media or cultural portrayals of hauntings. They are assumption-led theories and explanations that never seem to provide the proof. A scientific investigator is neutral in his or her approach to



Poltergeist by Sigma (Creative Commons)

all anomalous cases, and never takes any theories for granted.

Similarly telling someone they have a 'poltergeist' will evoke expectations in them of what a poltergeist should act like and in building such expectations can bring fear and ethical harm.

Even the term 'haunting' carries cultural baggage but is still useful as it firstly provides a common reference point, using clients' own language whilst secondly not making so many assumptions about the cause of events. A

haunting is only a haunting when the person experiencing it labels it such. Until then it is just a series of unconnected events. For example one person who finds their car keys in the 'wrong place' and hears creaks on their floorboards may call it a 'haunting' whilst another person may not even notice it. Similarly this 'haunting' may well have totally normal causes and may cease to be a haunting when a client stops labelling it as such.

By stripping back pre-conceived ideas, theories and jargon an investigator can focus on the events at hand and attempt to uncover the underlying causes without the distraction of bias getting in their way.

Poltergeists are rich topics of research for historians, sociologists and anthropologists but on the ground investigators may not be able to 'see the wood for the trees' if they get wrapped up in pre-conceived ideas. The only way to really find out what is happening out there is throw away our biases and focus on the facts.

Dave Wood



A Christmas Ghost Story

Christmas Eve, 5.24 p.m.

By Simon Kurt Unsworth

“Can we sit? For a moment?”

Elise sat, smoothing her uniform. Illness affects more than the ill, she remembered, more than the ill. She was here not just for the poor woman in the room above them but for her husband as well.

He was old, and drinking red wine from a balloon glass, its smell rich and aromatic. He saw her watching him drink and said, “I don’t usually do this.” Elise said nothing. A heavy bang came from somewhere above them, followed by a pause and then a series of quieter taps. Elise looked up at the ceiling,

at the cobwebs in the corners and the lampshade with its skin of dust, and started to rise. “No,” said the man, “please, I was up there only a few minutes ago. She does this all the time, bangs on the floor with her stick, calls for me. She forgets that she’s just seen me.”

Elise lowered herself back down into the seat. The room’s only Christmas decoration, a tree half-covered in listless tinsel and drab baubles, drooped in the corner. Outside, it was growing dark; this was Elise’s last visit of the day and she was looking forward to getting home. Around her, the house’s night-time breathing was muted, all soft swallows and gentle settles. The man took another sip of his wine.

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"She was so beautiful," he said quietly. "Still is, really. She was full of life, so quick, so sharp, until this thing came along and took hold of her. At first it was silly things, forgetting where she'd put something, calling someone the wrong name. We used to laugh about it."

Elise nodded; it was a story she'd heard before, refracted and refolded and in different hues but essentially the same. People watched as their loved ones altered, disintegrated, became someone else. "Now, I'm all she has," said the man, "although she doesn't know me. She calls me, although she can't remember my name." As if to prove it, the thumps and taps came again from the upper room, following a long, dragging exhalation that might have been a shout. From some other place in the house, a clock started chiming; moments later, its companion on the room's mantle joined it.

"I watched and I couldn't do anything," said the man when the clocks had finished their mournful singing. "She forgot more, became duller and duller, then she started getting frightened and would wander. I had to lock the doors of our home to prevent her leaving in the night. She lost control of her body, couldn't toilet herself, started to need help to eat, to bathe, to dress." He took another sip of wine, a bigger one, and then tilted the remaining contents of the glass into his mouth. Another series of bangs came from above them and another cry, long and formless.

"She forgets," he said. "She always forgets. I go and clean her and feed her and sit with her and brush her hair and make her comfortable, and then I come down here and she calls me within moments because she forgets all the time I was with her."

"Yes," said Elise, businesslike, and rose. "Perhaps I could go and see her?" Her watch swung against her breast like the tap of a tiny fist, the glints from its face catching her eye. Late, it said, you're late.

"Of course," said the man. "I'm sorry, I've been keeping you. I know you're busy."

"No, said Elise, not wanting to mean yes but meaning it anyway. "Shall I find my own way there?" "I'll show you," said the man and rose. He was tall, taller than her but stooped, his hands and face as white as cuttlefish bone except for the red stains around his lips. He led her out of the room.

The banging was louder in the hallway, as were the calls. Elise had heard it before, the liquid slip of a voice whose ability to form or remember words was decaying. It filled the stairway around them like dark, oily waves.

"Sometimes, I locked her in her room, just so I knew where she was," said the man as they reached the top of the stairs. "Can you imagine, having to lock up the person you love like some kind of prisoner? She'd bang on the walls and scream and cry, but what could I do? I hated myself for it, and for being grateful when she finally couldn't walk any more and had to stay in her bed."

The banging was louder now, more insistent. "Then she started to call me," he said, "constantly calling me, calling anyone, hitting the floor with her stick, hitting the walls. She used to knock over her table until I moved it out of the room. I sometimes think it's her, the real her, trapped in the centre of this helpless thing, trying to reach me, to find a way back. I can't stand it." The stick banged, the voice called out again.

Elise didn't know what to say. The man went to the nearest door and opened it. Through the entrance, she saw the old woman's wasted body lying motionless on the bed and the pillow covering her face. Her stick lay, out of reach, on a chair by the bed.

"I love her," said the man and began to cry, and the sound of banging grew louder and louder.

With thanks to Stephen Volk for introducing us to the author resulting in this original story.

Photo of Enfield, the most famous poltergeist case.
Credit: Mary Evans Picture Library/Laurie Berger



Poltergeist?

- You Decide

A Statement of Events

Part 1 of 2, by David Holdich

Since 2000 my job has included working with liquid nitrogen, bottled and compressed gases, control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) and driving electric tug trucks and forklifts. During this time I have heard rumours that the site where I work is believed to be haunted, with secret areas in the basement which are now closed off, and stories of unfortunate accidents and even a suicide.

I've been told it was used as a tank maintenance workshop during World War 2. It contained acid rooms and the Print and Post room has since been moved and the area in which it occupied is now being used by an outside engineering company. This company is in the forward part of the building, and covers approximately one third of the total floor space. It is then separated from the remaining building space which is being used mostly for furniture

storage. As a result the storage area has fallen into minor disrepair with a leaking roof, draughty windows and broken floor tiles.

It was in this storage area that I was working with a colleague. I was assigned the task of sorting and removing confidential waste paper from the building. My colleague was relatively new and knew nothing of the history of the buildings or their previous usage. To begin with there was myself, my colleague (who I will refer to as A), my boss F (who left us to our task some time later, but before the events I describe took place) and we were joined by another colleague (M) late in the afternoon, giving three witnesses to this event.

The weather had come over dark and torrential rain had been falling, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Due to the building's state of disrepair in this rear area we had no lighting and decided it was too dark for us to see what we

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were doing. Myself and A took a break of around 30 minutes while we waited for the weather to clear and for visibility to improve and then continued our task.

Shortly after we had restarted working I noticed the sound of something hitting the ground. The sound was quite heavy and sounded as if a metal bracket, like those used for holding up shelving, had been thrown and hit the tiled flooring, a small distance away from our position in the open space of the main workshop area. At first I barely noticed the sound and assumed that another staff member had entered the area and had dropped something. It was only when the sound reoccurred a short time later that I thought to investigate further. I checked the immediate area and found it to be empty. I then called out the name of my supervisor (referred to as P) thinking he may be playing tricks on A and me. I received no response when calling out, so decided that I'd catch him out should he be playing tricks, by ringing him and setting off his ringtone, thereby revealing his hiding place. I phoned him and heard no ringtone coming from inside the room. He answered and said he was in the back, near the Learning Centre. As this was some distance away, I ruled out the possibility he'd caused the sounds.

Assured that no one else was present, I decided to keep a close eye on A in case he was playing a joke. Whilst I was watching him, another sound emanated from somewhere else in the room, some distance behind where we were. At this point I thought fraud was a possible cause and decided further investigation was required. There had been at least three incidents at this point and I turned my attention to the condition of the ceiling. I looked for loose debris which may have fallen, but I couldn't see anything, and was then called away to concentrate on another task. This task took about fifteen minutes to complete and I returned to the scene of events to continue my enquiries and try to figure what had been going on.

As myself and A entered the building, we again heard sounds, this time more frequent than before we left. M had joined us and I

wondered if this was causing this new apparent upsurge in sounds. Whilst myself, M and A were all stood together, another loud metallic sound was heard. This pretty much cleared M of causing the previous events.

I was at this stage ready to blame the poor state of repair of the building, and the heavy rain and strong winds, thinking these combined could have caused parts of the roof to become loose and fall. However, the number of sounds heard would mean a lot of loose debris, which in turn would suggest the building to be quite unstable, and this would be a matter for health and safety to investigate. I used my mobile phone video camera to film the events described above and went back to the office and subsequently signed out and went home.

The following day I reviewed the video I had taken, and to my surprise, seem to have captured an EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomena). I said on the video that "We'll be going now then if you're not interested" trying to evoke a response. At the time nothing was heard, but on the video you can clearly hear a whispered response, which is unrecognisable as a voice of those present at the time. After listening to this recording many times, I'm still at a loss to figure out what's being said, and to this end, shall be playing the clip to others in an attempt to get their views.

These events would last another three or four days, continuing after I returned from a period of annual leave. There were further incidents where small objects, such as nuts and bolts, were being thrown. These objects were plentiful in supply in this run down storage area.

I continued to suspect A of fraudulently causing these events and kept a close eye on him throughout. I'm still left in doubt because there were occasions when myself and A were stood together, and noise would still come from the other end of the room. Additionally, objects would land near us when we were again stood next to each other, and the direction of travel of these objects again

suggested they'd been thrown from the other end of the room.

Pieces of paperwork and old archive photographs were now appearing in areas where they'd not previously been. On one occasion, myself and A went to our tea break of around twenty minutes. On our return we found a photograph in the middle of the floor. I asked A if he was responsible for this and he denied any involvement.

There was no monitoring of this area, and I cannot rule out the possibility that someone had been in and placed the photo where it was found or that it had simply fallen from somewhere naturally. This leaves me wanting to rule out a paranormal explanation for this occurrence. Other photos were found later, usually in or around the same area, and a large collection of photos was discovered in a box nearby a matter of hours later. I mention the photographs simply because they were an event which took place as a part of the larger series of events, over a period of time.

More small objects were thrown as the work in this area continued, including more nuts and bolts, a small fluffy desktop toy/object, an AAA battery, a foot support from the base of a desk and pieces of floor tile. Things continued to fall from the roof, including a piece of seal, which I witnessed detach, fall and strike A on the head. As it was small and relatively light it caused no harm, although it did startle him.

As I say, these events continued for a few days, three or four at most, and then ceased.



Poltergeist? Attribution as cover

I've worked in the area many times before these events, and since, without disturbance of any kind. Until now I assumed that the events were a fraud, and A, occasionally aided by M, was having as a joke at my expense. However, there were occasions when A and myself were working together and were still pelted with small objects, and after a search of the area was carried out, found to be alone. The apparent EVP capture, and the disconnection of the sealant which fell on A, witnessed by myself, has caused me to carry out this review, revising my statement of events written at the time, and adding the events which

occurred in the following days, which I had not previously documented.

With regards to the EVP captured, I did play it to several independent people, who were not present at the time of recording, and who'd not visited the area, thus ensuring they had no preconceived ideas, or auto-suggestion implanted by their own experiences. Two of these listeners agreed they thought the 'voice' was saying "Get Out", and even with this suggestion, I still can't say if I agree with them or not.

Another reason for writing this review is my more recent research into Poltergeist phenomena. As I mentioned above, I had largely dismissed these events as fraud but I noted some similarities to Poltergeist type phenomena, which I'll explain in more detail.

Second and final part, continued in the next edition...

A wide-angle photograph of a modern lecture hall. The audience is seated in a semi-circular arrangement of wooden desks, facing a stage. A lecturer is seated at a desk on the right side of the stage, with a large projection screen behind them displaying a presentation. The room has a high ceiling with recessed lighting and a large doorway in the background.

It's Back

Seriously Strange
University of Bath
6-8 September 2013
Pre-book tickets inside