

ISSUE 144  
AUTUMN 2013

seriously  
**strange**  
magazine

**Hunting Ghosts**  
*without*  
**the Gadgets**

ALSO INSIDE:

Seriously Strange Conference Review

Military Mysteries

ASSAP News and Events

Vampires and the Paranormal

ASSAP National Belief and Experience Survey

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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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# The First Accredited Qualification for Paranormal Investigators

Course Tutor CJ Romer, Programme Chair Dave Wood and Internal Verifier Simone Taylor preparing to unveil the course structure and content at Seriously Strange

**Many distance learning courses exist aimed at paranormal investigators, of greater or lesser quality, but all are unaccredited. Whilst ASSAP has offered training for decades it has never offered a distance learning course.**

All the pieces came together in September 2013 when ASSAP was awarded Accreditation Centre status by NCFE (National Council for Further Education - established 1848) and the ASSAP course "Principles of of Paranormal Investigation" was accepted as an accredited course.

ASSAP gained the top mark (excellent) in all 32 of NCFE's criteria during its application to become an awarding body.

This is a testament to the hard work of the Education Committee over a period of

time, especially Simone Taylor, CJ Romer, David Ball and Dave Wood.

**Launch:** A trial run of 20 applicants applied at Seriously Strange. A further intake will open later this year or early next year, once we have reviewed the course.

**Cost:** At present the course only costs £60 but this needs to be assessed against costs and may rise.

**Time:** The course should take roughly 95 hours to complete, usually over 3-6 months but this is flexible.

**Content:** The course is very skills and competency focused. The three modules are about 'science', 'ethics and risk assessment' and the substantial 'case management' module.

We will update you soon on opportunities to take part.



# seriously staked

## VAMPIRE SYMPOSIUM

8 MARCH 2014 • LONDON •  
ASSAP.AC.UK/VAMPIRES

Look beyond the Twilight and True Blood frenzy and there is, and always has been, a serious study of vampires. **Seriously Staked** brings together a wide variety of subject experts and academics to talk about a range of questions vampiric. These include:

**Can science explain vampires?**

**Do real vampire hunting kits exist?**

**How have vampires impacted western culture?**

**What is the crossover between vampires and other anomalous phenomena?**

**Was Transylvania vampirism a Communist trick to attract tourists?**

**What is the London vampire community like today?**

**Do real vampires exist?**

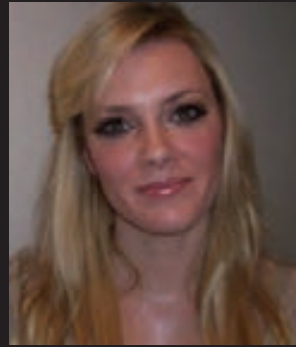
Seriously Staked is taking place at Goldsmiths College on 8th March 2014 and is co-organised by ASSAP (the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena) and the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Seriously Staked is the latest in a series of paranormal conferences organised by ASSAP, following in the footsteps of Seriously Strange and Seriously Unidentified. ASSAP is a registered charity and learned society that has been studying the weird seriously (and the seriously weird) since 1981.

Seriously Staked promises a serious but entertaining look at the vampire phenomenon.

**Book today with 40% off at  
assap.ac.uk/vampires**

## SPEAKERS INCLUDE



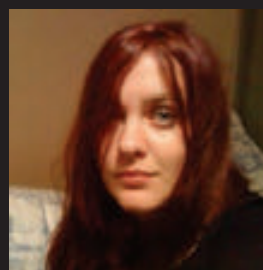
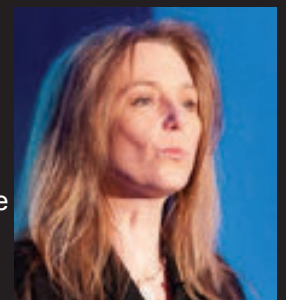
Dr Maria Mellins is a Senior Lecturer in Screen Media and specialises in teaching modules on horror and cult cinema, audiences and fan practices, fashion and beauty. Her book *Vampire Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2013) draws on empirical audience research data collected from vampire film fans and members of the vampire subculture.

Dr. Stacey Abbott is a Reader in Film and Television Studies at the University of Roehampton, where her teaching and research specialism focuses upon the horror genre, the gothic and the vampire in both film and television. She is the author of *Celluloid Vampires: Life after Death in the Modern World* (2007).



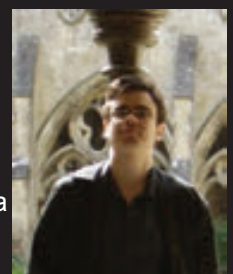
Dr Kathryn Harkup: There are those amongst us who shy away from sunlight, bite at the slightest opportunity and refuse any food containing the slightest hint of garlic. These people aren't all characters in Gothic novels and Hollywood movies either. This talk will look at some scientific theories for the origin of vampire myths.

Deborah Hyde writes, lectures internationally and appears on broadcast media to discuss superstition, religion, and belief in the supernatural. She uses a range of approaches and disciplines from history to psychology to investigate the folklore of the malign and to discover why it is so persistent throughout all human communities and eras.




Dr Hannah Gilbert will discuss the influence of Dracula and his literary successors, its influence on and by Western culture. She will also examine issues underlying the problems with popular ideas about vampire authenticity, and how a merging of fiction, folkloric legend and experience has contributed to continuing presence.

John Fraser is a paranormal researcher and occasional author who has worked on behalf of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula, the Romanian folklore and tourist organisation responsible for organising the World Dracula Congress. He has been on conferences and study trips to Transylvania on various occasions and has (apparently) always returned safe and unharmed.



## MORE SPEAKERS TBA



A day of talks about the science, biology, history and culture of **vampires**.

8 March 2014, London

~~£25~~ £15

40% OFF - ENDS SOON!

seriously  
staked

VAMPIRE SYMPOSIUM

8 MARCH 2014 • LONDON •  
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Photo CCL Marek

[assap.ac.uk/vampires](http://assap.ac.uk/vampires)

ASSAP

Goldsmiths  
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run in partnership 8 March 2014



# Seriously Investigating

## The ASSAP Training Weekend

### 16-17 November 2013

### Birmingham

### Book via [assap.ac.uk/training](http://assap.ac.uk/training)

West Brom Town Hall

#### Training Weekend

Ideal for people wanting to sign up to the NRPI and the Accredited Qualification.

**Cost:** £25\*, **Location:**

West Bromwich Town Hall, Birmingham

**Date:** Sat-Sun 16-17 November

\* Cost includes training, materials and refreshments. Does not include lunch (there are plenty of places to eat locally) or accommodation.

#### Accommodation

There is a Premier Inn 100 metres from the Town Hall with current availability for £29-£34 rooms. We recommend booking these early.

It offers a fantastic opportunity to gather with like-minded people and learn the scientific way to do it! Whether you have been doing this a while and want to know how the scientific side works or whether you're brand new to the field, this course is for you.

Subjects include:

- The variety of phenomena we study
- Interviewing
- How not to run an investigation!
- How to run an investigation
- Finding and handling cases
- Analysing evidence
- Report writing

# 6 Seriously Strange Highlights



## On 6-8 September 2013 260 people booked to attend THE Paranormal Event of the Year - Seriously Strange at the University of Bath

**T**he biggest paranormal event of the year made a triumphant return last month. Few thought *Seriously Strange 2013* could rival the excitement of 2011's 30th anniversary celebration, which benefited from free tickets and the buzz around the professional body announcement. However, this year's conference was only 5% smaller than its ground-breaking predecessor and the feedback and excitement at the event was even better. This was helped by the announcement of the first accredited qualification for paranormal investigators and the last-minute addition of comedy legend Reece Sheersmith to the lineup.

With 30 speakers and panellists the event was on a big scale. Delegates enjoyed a bigger Paranormal Olympics and 125

people enjoyed the Gala Dinner and post-dinner entertainment, which included a rousing after-dinner speech by former MP Lembit Opik, a great musical set by the up-and-coming Rozii Chaos and hilarious paranormal-themed comedy from Paul Gannon. Delegates danced way into the night with the paranormal-themed disco, which included a long conga to Ghostbusters.

The format for the weekend was different, with the time split between panel debates on various subjects and longer spots for individual speakers.

Bookings opened for the Training Weekend and also opened (and closed) for the first tranche of learners for the accredited qualification and NRPI registrations. The next ASSAP conference - Seriously Staked -

also started to sell tickets.

Conference also saw the launch of ASSAP's National Paranormal Belief and Experience survey, which has gained some attention and is reported elsewhere in this magazine.

This time the conference will not only be recorded through the next *Anomaly Journal* but was also kindly filmed by Dave Kelly and will be available through the ASSAP website.

Feedback from the weekend was overwhelmingly positive, with reviews appearing on various websites within a couple of days.

ASSAP events seem to be going from strength to strength each year, and we look forward to seeing you at the Training Weekend or at *Seriously Staked: Vampire Symposium*.



Taking over a local bar for the Friday night informal social



ASSAP Hon President Lionel Fanthorpe kicks off the event



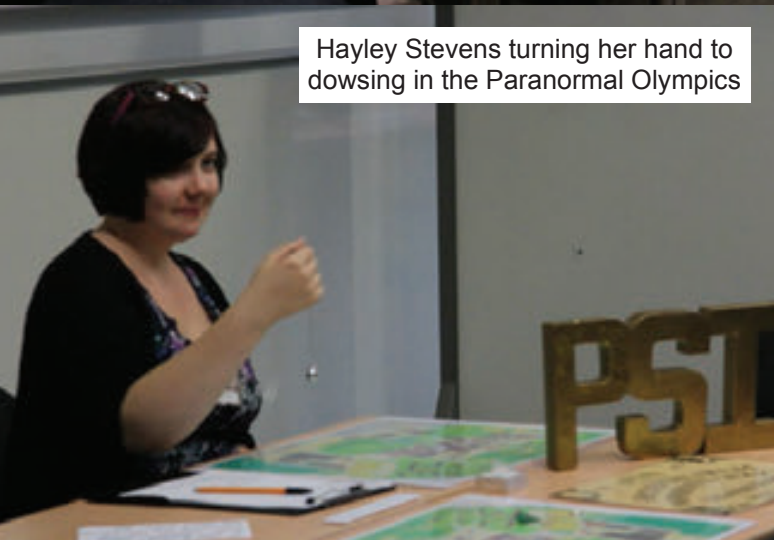
ASSAP Chairman Dave Wood addressing conference



Debating interdisciplinary perspectives on anomalous phenomena



We don't know what these people are up to



Hayley Stevens turning her hand to dowsing in the Paranormal Olympics



Are poltergeists and ghost different phenomena?

# 8 Seriously Strange Highlights



Comedy legend BAFTA-winning Reece Shearsmith (creator of The League of Gentlemen and Psychoville) with ASSAP exec members and volunteers.



Lembit Opik working the room at the Gala Dinner



Rozii Chaos entertaining the crowds



Richard Freeman leading the Ghostbusters conga



Debating the future of ghost investigation

## Did you miss out?



Seriously Strange can now be viewed at [assap.ac.uk/videos](http://assap.ac.uk/videos) thanks to Dave Kelly.

You can also catch articles in the next edition of Anomaly.

## Our Thanks

Our thanks go to the 260 people who booked or turned up on the day. We would like to thank the volunteers: Sarah, Stephen, Alison, Ian, Wendy, Maurice, Val, Nicky, Simone, David B, Dave K and Paul. A huge thanks to the speakers and panellists: Guy Lyon Playfair, Lembit Opik, Chris French, Chris Roe, Stephen Volk, Sacha Claire Christie, Richard Freeman, Lionel Fanthorpe, David Farrant, Hayley Stevens, Jack Hunter, Trystan Swale, Steve Parsons, Hannah Gilbert, CJ Romer, Cal Cooper, John Fraser, John Llewellyn Probert, Simon Kurt Unsworth, Tim Lebbon, Reece Shearsimth, Brian Clegg, John Sabol, Tony Eccles, Robert Moore and others!

# Launch of the ASSAP National Belief and Experience Survey

**ASSAP has long recognised that the key to studying anomalous phenomena is what and how individuals experience, and the belief that informs that experience.**

Since the SPR's Census of Hallucinations in 1894 there have been repeated attempts to understand what it is that people experience, and for good reason. By knowing exactly what people experience it helps us to know how to focus our research, and if there are any areas of anomalous phenomena that are not receiving enough attention.

Knowing what comprises a 'haunting' helps to direct investigation and research. For example, surveys in the 2000s suggested that apparitions became a less common part of a haunting. The reason cited was that hauntings depicted on reality TV shows like Most Haunted, for

obvious reasons, rarely included an apparition.

Other types of phenomena get less research attention, such as crisis apparitions and bereavement apparitions.

But what is lacking is a regular, scientific and representative survey that helps to track trends over time.

The ASSAP National Belief and Experience Survey was launched at Seriously Strange 2013 to fill this niche.

ASSAP commissioned top polling company YouGov to complete a survey amongst 2,286 UK adults. Unlike self-selecting surveys, polls are weighted to be representative and are relatable to the whole population rather than just people who are interested in the paranormal.

The ASSAP NBES has already attracted national media attention and a lot of interest from academics. We hope this will become a regular piece of work so that we can build a better picture over time.

Full findings will be published in the next Anomaly journal, but here is a flavour:

52% of British adults believe in ghosts, up from 40% in a different survey from 2009

39% of British adults believe in UFOs, down from 52% in 2008 in a different survey from 2009

22% of British adults have had a paranormal experience, 15% a ghost experience, 2% a UFO experience and 5% other experiences

**Check your next copy of Anomaly for full results.**

*Some of the media outlets covering the launch of the ASSAP NBES so far*

  
**THE SUNDAY TIMES**

**THE Sunday Telegraph**

**FREE METRO**

ASSAP Director Nicky Sewell outlining findings at Seriously Strange



## MILITARY MYSTERIES

By President and First Lady, Lionel and Patricia Fanthorpe

We were recently invited to lecture for the Weird Weekend held at the Redoubt Military Museum in Eastbourne, and had a great time with all our friends there, who looked after us extremely well. In the course of researching for the lecture, which needed to include some Eastbourne paranormal incidents, we came across the



A view inside the Redoubt Fortress & Military Museum, Eastbourne

story of the phantom soldier. A number of reliable witnesses are certain that they have seen him standing quietly outside the Atlantis Nightclub which was once the Starlight Theatre. He wears WWII uniform, and Eastbourne researchers into the paranormal have speculated that he may be the ghost of a soldier who spent his final leave in Eastbourne before rejoining his unit overseas and being killed in action.

Sightings of phantom soldiers and phantom armies and the re-enactment of brutal battles are an intriguing area of anomalous phenomena.

In August 1942, Canadian Commandos landed near Dieppe in France. The enemy had been alerted and the Allied troops were mown down by enemy mortars, rifles and machine guns. Thousands of dead commandos covered the beaches.

In August 1951, Dorothy Norton and Agnes Lawton were on holiday in Dieppe. One morning they were woken up at 4 a.m. by the sound of machine guns, and the roar of exploding shells. The noise of battle continued until almost 7 a.m. The witnesses did not see the phantom army, but the sounds told the story in all its gruesome detail.

A much earlier report of phantom army activities was the re-enactment of the Battle of Cedar Creek, which formed part of the American Civil War. In October 1864, Sheridan's army of the Shenandoah suffered a surprise attack by General Early's Confederates. The Union soldiers retreated, until

Sheridan arrived in person, rallied his disorganized men and launched a brilliantly successful counter-attack on the Confederates. A great many good soldiers from both sides died in that battle. Numerous reliable witnesses in the Cedar Creek area still report having heard the sounds of the battles there being fought again.

Glastonbury has the footfalls of men at arms, and the clanking of their armour. From Woodmanton in Wiltshire come reports from reliable witnesses who have seen spectral warhorses galloping to a battle fought centuries ago. Best known of all, perhaps, are the anomalous phenomena replaying the Battle of Edge Hill in 1642, where almost 5,000 men were killed. Only a few months after the battle came the first reports from witnesses claiming to have seen it fought again in the sky.

Investigating these reports of phantom armies – which are a persistent global phenomenon – would be an intriguing area of research for our expert ASSAP investigators.



## Hunting Ghosts *without the Gadgets*



By Dave Wood

Millions of Britons have experienced ghosts and an unknown number of those will get in touch with a paranormal investigator to try to understand what is happening in their house, their place of work or wherever. The trepidation these people must feel is understandable, inviting unknown internet-folk into your home to talk about something you may not have even discussed with your friends and family. What do they expect from their ghost hunter? Perhaps something like Most Haunted, or TAPS?

Twitching the curtains as their 'buster arrives I know many clients feel reassured when they turn up in a couple of cars packed to the edges with silver flight cases. It stands to reason: to hunt ghosts you need gadgets that flash like you see on the TV, and anyone who has that many flight cases must know what they are doing, right?

Contrast this with the atypical appearance of a paranormal investigator at the door just armed with a notepad or dictaphone. The client might well be suspicious. Is this person credible? Without a team and an armoury of gadgets can you possibly take their findings seriously? In reality this should never happen, of course, as an investigator worth their salt will fully brief a client ahead of any visit as to exactly who and what they should expect, what their methodology is and any gadgetry that might be in place.

Trainees on the ASSAP Training Weekend will be familiar with the idea that 'more is less' and that there is (often, not always) an inverse relationship between the amount of equipment and the scientific credibility of the investigation. I am more likely to find the man with the notebook and pen credible than the team with the hundred flight cases.

So far as I can tell there are three reasons why people use gadgets like EMF meters, EVP, thermometers and photography during ghost investigations: 1) that is what we see on the TV, if they do it then we must do it too, 2) because they have had a personal experience with equipment, perhaps the EMF meter 'went off' when they were having an experience and the two remain linked in their minds or 3) other paranormal investigators have taught them that all the gadgets are needed, usually because of reasons (1) or (2).

None of these are solid reasons for adopting a methodology. It is true that there is much merit in 'testing' the methods other people use just to see if they work, and I have done this myself at great length. However, continuing this practice year after year is questionable.

Ultimately the only reason to include gadgets in your investigation is where there is a strong reason to do so. Starting with a blank slate and including things when there is a justification is the more scientific place to start, rather than including TV-style equipment lists as a default position.

Here's a few things we know for sure:

- Theories like 'people speculate energy has something to do with ghosts and EMF meters measure energy therefore EMF meters might measure ghosts' are not scientific theories. They are guesswork. That is OK if we can prove a link between EMF meters and ghost experiences, even if we don't know why there is a link (yet). But...
- Over thousands of investigations no one has proven a link between gadgets and ghost experiences. In most cases 'anecdotes' of EMF meters 'going off' when someone feels something unusual are presented. But no one has proven these to be anything more than coincidence. In fact studies published in the journal *Anomaly* have shown the relationship to be nothing more than coincidence where this has been studied.
- The gadgets we use are useless. Handheld EMF meters fluctuate just because they are moved around, making any results useless, thermometers are mostly incapable of measuring a temperature as accurate as you need, and the list goes on. Hardly any pieces of kit are fit for purpose.
- If you're spending all your time fiddling with equipment and analysing their results, that is not time you're spending getting to the bottom of the haunting that led you there in the first place.

When we use so-called 'ghost hunting gadgets' the only thing this really demonstrates is that we do not understand how they work, or what they are used for. This returns us to my central argument that a person with a notepad or dictaphone is more credible than a team with a van-load of kit. We cannot guarantee notepad-guy is credible as we don't know anything about him or her, but odds-on we can state that the flight-case brigade is probably not scientific.

Reality is never black and white of course. There are plenty of gadget-free investigators who are unscientific, and a team can turn up with a van-load of CCTV equipment and be very scientific in outlook. But my increasing realisation is that the 'no gadgets' approach is the way forwards. No cameras, no thermometers, no gadgets at all. A notepad is fine, a dictaphone and camcorders or CCTV is great. But that's about it.

The use of equipment is worth studying in its own right of course, and more standalone research needs to be done into EVP and new pieces of equipment that come on the market. However when it comes to investigating ghost cases we are best off pre-warning our clients that we will be leaving the equipment at home and just focussing on their experiences.



## Vampires and the Paranormal

By Michael John Gage

Serious cases of vampirism are vastly forgotten by the mainstream. The subject has been trivialised by the current culture to such a point that the majority of contemporary investigators and researchers bypass the genre with ease, citing it as a fantastical, almost comical topic to consider. However, deep below the media's influence on the subject of vampirism there is a subject so rich with history, so complex, and to some so real that the topic should be shelved alongside the more modern, and popular cases of the paranormal.

The history of vampirism dates far beyond the fictional stories from Bram Stoker of *Dracula*. Written accounts of evil blood-sucking beings have been found in historical texts, and vampire-like remains have been unearthed at a number of archaeological sites around the world with findings published in scientific journals. There are modern day reports of vampire encounters, and even accounts of people stepping forward and admitting to being a vampire. Vampire-like animals and insects are scientifically known to exist, so is it so far of a stretch to believe that vampire-like humans are among us as well?

Around the world, but particularly in the United States, vampirism has infected modern culture. Works of fiction such as the very popular book series *Twilight* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; films such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *From Dusk Till Dawn* all helped in solidifying the grip of vampirism in our everyday lives. Lifestylers, who may be influenced by this entertainment, who claim they are real vampires drinking blood, and absorbing 'life energy', are very real concepts. Whether they should be investigated by paranormal researchers or sociologists is a topic that should be investigated further regardless of one's own opinion.

In England, the Highgate Cemetery reports of the 70s, involving Sean Manchester and David Farrant, saw alleged sightings of vampires in London and remain to this day as the 'go to' incidents for researchers of

modern era reports. There were even reports of people being attacked by said creature, however when an investigation into the matter began, the sightings seem to have stopped. Sightings continue around the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, and excavations of alleged vampire remains have been found and documented in scientific journals.

With both the modern 'lifestyle' vampires, and with the continual sightings of 'spiritual' traditional vampires around the world, the subject should be researched and investigated like any other claims made of paranormal activity. Vampire encounters are not simply phenomena limited to the past. Reports as recent as last year describing alleged vampirism have been reported. In 2012 a vampire sighting by a group of tourists in Highgate cemetery surfaced, and in the same year in Texas a young boy reported being attacked by a tall, cloaked, dark figure and bitten on the neck. And on the other side, there are modern vampire hunters bent on research or even eradication of vampires they believe exist. People such as Joel Martin or Stephen Kaplan for example believe that vampires truly exist, and truly believe that vampires live among us and correspond with them regularly.

Vampires are clearly a phenomenon that has been simplified by the media, and by the neglect from investigators and researchers. Despite this, reports of vampires are ever present in our society and deserve a lot more attention from the research community than they are currently receiving. Bigfoot, Loch Ness and the Icelandic Lagarfljót Worm have all received vast amounts of research and investigation, so why not vampires? Because they seem fantastical and unlikely? Are they more unlikely than extraterrestrials? No, and this is why we should begin taking them far more seriously.

*Photo by Fredrik Sanden*



## Seriously Strange Conference Review

By Andrew Hodrien

I had not previously attended the Seriously Strange conference; however I did attend the ASSAP UFO conference last year, so was looking forward to the weekend. Having attended the Scientific and Medical Network Body and Beyond and Society for Psychical Research conferences last year, along with presenting at the latter, I was interested to see how this conference might differ. I had just finished my Masters (Psychological Research Methods) dissertation on out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and was beginning a new research job on OBEs literally the day after the conference, so this was very relevant to me.

### Saturday

The conference kicked off with an introduction from ASSAP president Reverend Lionel Fanthorpe and very soon Christian Jensen Romer was turning the question of whether our home is haunted on its head in a talk entitled *Let me convince you your home is haunted*. Chris' talk was enlightening, entertaining, and at times amusing. It covered personal experiences of potential poltergeist activity in his parents' home, and his research into what makes people perceive their home to be haunted, but by studying those who believe their home is not haunted. The latter included a critique of Houran and Lange's previous study in 1996 which I found interesting from having studied parapsychology.

Next were two panels, the first being – *Ghost Fiction and Ghost Fact: Storytelling and Paranormal Research*. This was a discussion between supernatural writers Stephen Volk (Chair), Tim Lebbon, Simon Kurt Unsworth, John Llewellyn Probert, and Reece Shearsmith, about how the

content of their writings related to apparitional and poltergeist research and reflected the cultural importance of such topics. The 2<sup>nd</sup> panel, *Poltergeists and Hauntings: Same Difference?*, by Sarah Spellman (chair), Guy Lyon Playfair, CJ Romer, Trystan Swale, and Nicky Sewell, discussed whether poltergeists and hauntings are the same phenomenon, spookily enough. Guy challenged the stress hypothesis and supposed correlation between adolescent girls and poltergeist activity. The discussion raised an important issue of whether labelling phenomena is helpful in categorisation or harmful by interpreting things in a particular way.

Guy Lyon Playfair next gave a fascinating talk on *The Twin Thing*, exploring whether twins are telepathic, an overview of the research into twin telepathy and included video footage of demonstrations. Guy also noted that this area is significantly under-researched but that approximately one third of twins have such experiences, which warrants further research.

The panel on *Has Parapsychology Achieved Anything?* (CJ Romer, chair, Chris Roe, Chris French, Cal Cooper, Steve Parsons, and Brian Clegg) included issues of whether things previously considered as paranormal then later explained are a threat to parapsychology and what mainstream science has gained from parapsychology. Issues included a demand for greater communication between parapsychologists and paranormal researchers. Chris noted there has been limited research relative to parapsychology's 130-year history, so it has achieved a lot. An audience member also raised the issue of whether mainstream psychology or science in general has changed its viewpoint on parapsychology.

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Next, the *Inter-disciplinary Perspectives on the Seriously Strange* (CJ Romer, chair, Chris Roe, Chris French, Hannah Gilbert, and Jack Hunter). The panellists represented psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and first had to consider what approach they would each take if they received a phone call from a distressed member of the public who believes they are having apparitional experiences. The discussion included the need for collaborating more between disciplines. I think a multi-disciplinary approach is more healthy and reduces the risk of an investigation being biased.

David Farrant's *The Highgate Vampire Revisited* initially went down the route of relating vampire experiences to sleep paralysis, by talking about incubus and succubus experiences. This included the Highgate vampire incidents, some of which David personally witnessed whilst awake and moving, so sleep paralysis was unlikely to be the cause here! Of particular interest to me was his feeling of an alteration of consciousness during the sighting of the entity. David related this to the idea that more entities are seen at night because the level of consciousness is reduced, suggesting an alternative to the correlation being due to sleep-related causes such as hypnagogia/hypnopompia.

The ASSAP paranormal beliefs and experiences survey of 2,286 UK people was mentioned. I look forward to hearing further findings in the upcoming edition of *Anomaly*. There was also mention of ASSAP's accredited qualification which I'm sure will be welcomed, as I think there are only a limited amount of such courses outside of the degree route.

The gala dinner included Lembit Opik's after-dinner speech and I gave him the obligatory question on how MPs view the subject of UFOs. His talk was both amusing and enlightening, involving anecdotes about his experiences and revealed his prior involvement with psychical research, and he commended anyone interested in taking anomalous experiences seriously. This was followed by a singer (Rozii Chaos), a paranormal-themed comic (Paul Gannon), and a paranormal-themed disco.

## Sunday

This kicked off with Tony Eccles' *Close Encounters of the Shamanic Kind*. This was of special interest to me because ufology, and in particular the alien contact experience, has been a specific interest of mine for the last 20 years, and more recently I have been completing relevant research within psychology. Tony raised the issue that more transpersonal factors should be further explored and that the alien experience can be spiritually significant. He

mentioned that ufology has been focused on the physical aspects of the experience for too long and too much emphasis on looking for UFOs rather than talking to the witnesses. Tony provided case examples of experiencers and the meaning they draw from experiences. The importance of understanding the experience as transformative and implicating an altered state of consciousness was stressed, both of which are research areas I hope to pursue further. Tony's talk also included the previous Anamnesis Project, a study mapping characteristics of contactees, which he hopes to restore.

Professor Chris French's talk, *Weird Science: An Introduction to Anomalistic Psychology*, achieved what it set out to do by describing anomalistic psychology as the approach of explaining ostensibly paranormal phenomena using normal psychological processes. This included cognitive biases, estimations of probabilities, the 'Barnum effect' and 'cold reading', unreliable eyewitness testimony, susceptibility to false memories, top-down processing, and backwards satanic messages! Chris also noted anomalistic psychology is complementary to parapsychology, rather than opposing it and cannot disprove paranormal experiences, but offer plausible alternative explanations.

To offer a "complementary" alternative, Professor Chris Roe gave a talk on *Extra-Sensory Perception (ESP) and Dreams*. Chris was my degree dissertation supervisor, principal investigator for Ganzfeld and remote viewing research I completed with him last year, and now runs the Centre for the Study of Anomalous Psychological Processes (CSAPP) at Northampton University. He gave an overview of psi experiences and explained that parapsychology just offers a wider range of possible explanations for anomalous claims. It started by mentioning J. B. Rhine's case collections of spontaneous experiences and then focused on dream-related experiences, including potential normal explanations for these, providing an overview of the Maimonides sleep research. Chris also included his replication studies along with Dr Simon Sherwood (and his own positive results acting as a participant) which had significant results. He also mentioned the move from more proof-orientated research towards exploring patterns of psi phenomena using the Ganzfeld method. Such patterns include altered states of consciousness being conducive for psi, also suggestive personality types and target properties most conducive to success in parapsychological experiments, whilst noting that patterns are far from clear. At the risk of being accused of being biased I thought the talk gave a good overview of dream-related psi research.

The *Are UFOs Different from Other Anomalous Phenomena?* panel (Robert Moore, chair, Chris French, Sacha Christie, Tony Eccles, and Lembit Opik) considered UFO-related experiences along with other experiences such as out-of-body experiences, apparitions, hallucinations, experiencers being psychically-sensitive, and aliens being comparative to other entities (e.g., angels). Sacha, a UFO experiencer herself, noted that sleep paralysis does not explain all experiences; Tony added that how we label phenomena affects our interpretation of it, and Lembit suggested that life out there is likely and could be at a very different level of development to us. The phenomena which best compare with UFO/alien experiences were considered, with responses of false memories and sleep paralysis explaining a lot (Chris French), experiences not being explained by any narrative pro or against the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (Sacha Christie), some experiencers in close encounters can psychically control the phenomena (Tony Eccles), and there is the chance we may communicate through spiritual/paranormal methods with another intelligence (Lembit Opik).

I gave the panel a (notably difficult) question about the implication of altered states of consciousness being associated with experiences and whether the altered state is the cause or the result of the phenomena, something which might not always be considered. I, naturally enjoyed this panel, but with such a complex field and various other phenomena often associated with UFO/alien experiences, I feel it demands a much deeper discussion and (hopefully) a greater amount of research.

John Sabol gave a talk entitled *Roll Call of the Dead: Auditory Manifestations of an American Civil War Presence on a Haunted Battlefield*. Sadly I missed the start of this, but was quickly brought up to speed with John's direct presentation style which certainly got me engaged! John argued that we should not test anomalous phenomena in the lab trying to predict it, but explore it in the field. He raised issues of investigations imposing a new context on phenomena and that we should try to re-create the same context as the event. The talk included audio recordings which he believes contain manifestations of a battlefield event, which occurred at the locations. These were interesting, but I would have liked to hear more from the recordings. I'm sure various people at the conference had their own interpretation of the cause of the noises.

We were next provided an overview of the world of *Cryptozoology: On the Track of Living Monsters* by Richard Freeman. This included a discussion of various creatures in myths, animals previously seen as monsters (e.g., the mountain gorilla), animals

presumed to be extinct but possibly still here, and known animals grown to large sizes (e.g., the anaconda). Richard then talked about expeditions but as it got going he was unfortunately unable to include everything he had prepared. The final event was a panel on *The Future of Ghost Investigations* (Dave Wood, John Fraser, Hayley Stevens, Steve Parsons, and CJ Romer). This began with discussing the contribution apparitional research has added, issues around investigations charging money and also imposing something on the situation context. It ended with the question of the "future of ghost hunting" being solved – the answer being more rationalism, more experimental research, and fewer gadgets.

The conference sadly drew to a close but I thoroughly enjoyed it and also both catching up with people I had previously met and also meeting many others for the first time. In conclusion, the conference was *strange*, although perhaps not as strange as it would be if I was unfamiliar with such experiences! I sadly never got to participate in the Paranormal Olympics (too busy talking to people), so no comment on those but hope others enjoyed it. I headed home with thoughts of my research job on out-of-body experiences starting the following morning and the hope of one day presenting at Seriously Strange myself.

*Photos by Andrew Hodrien*

**Andrew Hodrien is a psychology graduate researcher, currently based at Nottingham Trent University as a research assistant for Dr David Wilde, on a research project on Out-of-Body Experiences (OBEs) developing a new measuring scale through both qualitative and quantitative methods.**

**If you wish to enquire about the research or mention an experience you have had please contact him at [andrew.hodrien@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.hodrien@ntu.ac.uk). He has research interests in consciousness studies and various anomalous experiences, in particular altered states of consciousness, such as OBEs and also Near-Death Experiences, and alien-related experiences.**

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