

ASSAP NEWS

ASSOCIATION FOR THE
SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF
ANOMALOUS PHENOMENA

NUMBER 1
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"... highest scientific standard of investigation ..."

NEW SOCIETY IS BORN

THE Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena — known colloquially as ASSAP — was established in response to a long-felt need at two distinct levels.

Faced with a multitude of small and often little-known societies dealing with narrow aspects of paranormal or unexplained phenomena (we prefer the more neutral term 'anomalous') it is little wonder that members of the general public are bemused. This happens at a time when interest has never been higher, yet authoritative comment scarcely at a lower ebb. It is understandable also that most people do not know where to turn for informed guidance on these matters, or for sympathetic help in dealing with spontaneous happenings that could range from apparitions and poltergeists to UFO sightings.

Then, researchers in various fields of the anomalous have themselves felt constrained by the suffocating specialisation of existing organisations. For some time talk between these researchers has centered on the setting up of a body that could take a truly multi-disciplinary approach, transcend the confines of individual subjects, and examine the field of investigation more widely, comparing and contrasting more meaningfully. So ASSAP was born.

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ASSAP will promote the highest scientific standards of investigation, reporting and discussion. It will have no corporate views or opinions and will discourage dogmatism in its members.

All views and no views will be grist to our particular mill, for we consider that by the open debate of theories arising from critical observation we shall arrive ultimately at a better understanding of truth.

If ASSAP succeeds as well as we hope, its secret will to a large extent lie in the harnessing and coordination of existing talent — persons and groups who are

currently acting and researching yet often unaware of what others are doing. Emphatically ASSAP will neither take over nor compete with existing organisations, but we believe that acting together we can be better and more effective than when working in isolation. The whole will truly be greater than the sum of the parts. The founders of ASSAP claim no monopoly of talent or expertise: we look to others for ideas as well, and hope that in time they will play as full a part as possible in ASSAP's organisation and government.

ASSAP will:

- * Create a national investigative network capable of immediate deployment in response to demand, and provide specialist groups or consultants giving back-up expertise and technical facilities.
- * Establish generally acceptable codes of investigative practice, procedural methods and ethical standards.
- * Create and maintain national data bases, including research files and reference facilities. Electronic data processing will assist the storage and rapid retrieval of information.
- * Open communication channels to facilitate the free flow of information between members.
- * Set up or integrate groups geographically or by subject specialisation and expertise.
- * Sponsor fundamental training programmes and on-going support and education facilities.
- * Establish positive relations with press and media, locally and nationally.
- * Present public meetings, lectures, exhibitions and generally seek every means of encouraging the community at large to adopt an intelligent, informed attitude to anomalous matters.

An ambitious programme — probably the most ambitious ever projected by an organisation of this kind. But we believe that this, and nothing less than this, is what is needed at this time. We hope you will help us to make it a reality.



Our first chairman

ASSAP's first chairman is Alan Hughes, 27-year-old Shipping Manager controlling world wide exports for a large chemical manufacturer.

In the past many societies have founded because administrators have been chosen by virtue of their prestige as researchers, but unfortunately good researchers do not necessarily make good administrators. Alan was chosen as Chairman because of formidable range of organisational experience.

During his career at his company he has held positions in their marketing, production and research departments where he obtained professional qualifications in chemistry and business administration.

He gained additional committee and organisational experience with several voluntary bodies. This included the National Federation of 18-Plus Groups, a large non-political, independent adult organisation for people aged between 18 and 30 where he served five years on their National Executive in several posts including that of Chairman. During those five years the national membership increased from 4,000 to more than 10,000 members spread in more than 200 groups throughout the country.

He has been interested for about ten years in many aspects of paranormal phenomena, especially those concerning poltergeists, apparitions and hauntings.

Alan Hughes looks forward to meeting the many new members in the months to come and is interested to find out what sort of association they wish ASSAP to be.

Editorial

ASSAP News primarily aims to link together the many small research groups scattered around the country and to print up to the minute reports of cases under investigation.

In this way it hopes to show the common factors between the various disciplines. For example, the Bristol research detailed on this page shows the links between UFO and psychical research.

We cannot, of course, do this without your help in sending in reports and news. It would help if your local group could appoint, if it hasn't already, a press officer who could regularly supply reports and keep ASSAP News in touch with what is going on in your group.

We would be grateful for anybody working on specific research or investigating a case to send a brief synopsis of your work at appropriate intervals.

I am sure you can think of many other ways to make ASSAP News a useful publication — for example you may wish to write asking for specific information or help.

It would help if all contributions were typed on one side of the paper only and double spaced but if that is not possible do not worry. Send items to me at

Starting next issue, we shall run a lively, outspoken and possibly controversial letters page. Contributions for this should be sent to Editorial Secretary Lesley Park who will also collate any information on forthcoming events you would like publicised in ASSAP News. Her address is:

Alan Cleaver
Editor

A case that defies pigeonholes

Once upon a time it seemed to be simple enough to put cases into tidy categories — this was a poltergeist, that a UFO case, this an instance of OOB (out-of-the-body), that a good old-fashioned haunting. But more and more, investigators are coming to recognise that few cases are quite so simple; and it is becoming in consequence more and more important that the investigator should be aware of the wide range of factors which may be involved.

A case currently under investigation by the Bristol Paranormal Research Group (affiliated to ASSAP) provides a good example of phenomena which defy pigeon-holing. Geoff Bird reports:

'During the course of an Earth Mysteries project, we were informed of a promising UFO case. 'Brian', the subject, is a man in his forties, a painter-decorator by trade, living in a small village in the West of England.

'He has had a lifetime of alleged psychic experiences, including a close encounter UFO case involving time-lapse and telepathic contact with alien intelligence. At the same time, he has demonstrated psychic ability more than once to members of our group. Particularly vivid was an incident in which Brian phoned our Chief Investigator, who was entertaining friends at the time, saying that he knew the host was about to partake of alcohol but warning that he would be ill-advised to do so. Due to a family emergency, the investigator had to use his car shortly afterwards, and was stopped at a routine police check. But for Brian's warning phone call, he might well have had a positive breath-test which could have resulted in loss of driving licence and putting his job at risk.

'Regressive hypnosis has been considered in Brian's case, but has been rejected to date on account of certain traumatic events in his childhood. Though he now accepts these events there could, I feel, be risk of emotional damage were they to resurface in any shape or form through hypnosis. While it is probable that some useful information might be gained thereby, the welfare of the witness must at all times be our first consideration.

'Brian is just one of many people with long histories of psychic incidents, often

(as in this case) resulting in a changed life-style: for Brian, the consequence has been to develop strong religious convictions. Research into such cases is, I feel, essential from both a psychological and a sociological viewpoint. Our investigation will, hopefully, be concluded in the near future, and will be available in report form to other investigators.'

The case of Brian is characteristic of cases being brought to the attention of investigators, in which UFO sightings are just one facet of a complex pattern of seemingly psychic incidents. It is, of course, well known that RSPK (random spontaneous psycho-kinesis, more popularly known as 'poltergeist' phenomena) is a frequent side-effect of UFO sighting; what is far from being established is what the connection is between the two types of phenomena, which comes first, and so on.

Geoff Bird is right to stress the importance of advancing our understanding of these phenomena, both to help the individual witness and to gauge their significance in sociological terms. While some people are frightened by such experiences, others are grateful for them, considering themselves privileged; some relate them to their religious beliefs, others are motivated by simple curiosity, a desire to know just what it is that they have experienced.

Most of the subjects that I myself have investigated have come into this last category. They weren't unduly alarmed at what happened, they didn't see themselves as freaks, they didn't think that some overwhelming spiritual experience had been given them. But they did, very much, want to know what had happened to them: and I would have liked, very

much, to be able to tell them. Hopefully, thanks to the efforts of the Bristol Group and others throughout the world, we shall gradually put the pieces together and come to a better understanding. But if we do, it will not be as a pure and simple poltergeist case, or UFO case, or out-of-the-body case. In this business, there are no pigeonholes.

Hilary Evans
Publications Officer

BUFORA

It seems even the highly respected British Unidentified Flying Object Research Association cannot escape from today's economic climate; recently it had to re-style its journal.

Chairman Mr Leslie Bayer has issued the following statement to ASSAP News:

"In common with a great number of other organisations BUFORA has found the rising costs of printing, paper and postage seriously affecting their financial position. The BUFORA Journal, which in its previous form was costing just under a thousand pounds an issue, has been re-styled with fewer pages and retitled The BUFORA Bulletin.

"The reduction in costs will not only permit the continued publication of the Journal of Transient Aerial Phenomena twice a year but will ultimately result in the BUFORA Bulletin being published more often than the previous journal. As soon as the financial position allows it we hope to restore the BUFORA Journal."

JENNY RANGLES is a full-time writer currently working on her third UFO book titled *UFO REALITY*. She has also written *UFO STUDY* and co-authored *UFOs: A BRITISH VIEWPOINT* with Peter Warrington. In November *ALIEN CONTACT* will be published which reports the investigations by herself and Paul Whetnall into the experiences of a family in North Wales. This includes numerous UFO sightings, alleged meetings with aliens and a considerable range of paranormal phenomena. She is Investigation Co-ordinator of the UFO Investigator Network (formed in 1977) — a small team of experienced investigators, fully screened and working on selected case investigations only, to an agreed minimum criterion. Jenny has also accepted the post of Investigation Case Co-ordinator for ASSAP.

The responsibilities of an investigator

During the course of my years of investigation with witnesses to paranormal events I have come across a number of situations which gave me cause to reflect. For example, I was forever arriving at an interview only to discover that one or two others had got to the witness first, and I knew fairly certainly that several others would follow me. The poor, bemused witness could sometimes take it in his stride, but often he got more than a little fed up with constantly repeating his story.

"Why the hell don't you lot get together?" someone once asked me. And so I became deeply concerned with trying to bring individual investigators more into contact. In 1974 I helped to form a network of independent northern UFO groups. And in 1977 I helped again with the creation of a national network of serious individual investigators. The effects of both were slow, but gratifying. Yet the problems, on the whole, still remain.

The difficulties are made more acute by the fact that many "investigators", so called, have more in common with Laurel and Hardy than with those of us who believe ourselves competent, serious students of the paranormal. I recall one instance where a group decided that the best way to conduct their interview was to descend "en masse" (all 27 of them!) and say prayers on the witness's doorstep! Fortunately this chap was mild mannered and patient. He let them have their say before politely closing the door. I can think of a few other witnesses who might not have been quite so tolerant. Yet even in this instance our witness was hardly encouraged to develop a favourable attitude towards paranormal researchers . . . which did not help the rest of us who followed this strange bunch.

What we tend to forget far too often is that when someone undergoes a paranormal experience they can suffer severely afterwards. There are not only the potential physical effects (which can and do take place) but also there is the almost inevitable social stigma which accompanies any revelation such as "I saw a UFO" or "Our house is haunted" or "My dead Aunt Mary just popped in for breakfast." And of course all of these experiences can very readily generate considerable psychological pressure, no matter how stable the witness. They may just have been subjected to one of the most frightening, disturbing experiences of their life, and may in consequence be compelled to rethink some of their preconceived ideas about the way the world must work. After all, at school one is generally taught that such things do not happen . . . which makes it rather awkward when they do!

I know this from personal experience. In January 1971 my grandmother died, right before my eyes. I was still a teenager and very upset by this. For the next couple of days I could not stay in the house where she had died and so went to stop with a friend some miles away. The night before the funeral I awoke in the middle of the night to a weird buzzing/tingling that I felt/heard (it is something I had experienced a number of times during my teenage years and it was always rather unnerving). At the same instant as I realised I was awake and tasted the fear, I found myself floating about three feet above the bed. This OOB (if that is what it was) lasted only a brief moment and I found myself instantly back on the bed . . . but quite unable to consider sleeping for the rest of the night. Of course it may have been no more than a dream stimulated by the natural stress I was under, but the point is that I truly experienced the terror which



participants in really strange encounters must share, and I came to know how profound the effects could be. It was several nights before I could get to sleep without feelings of absolute fear propping up my heavy laden eyelids.

This is a problem so often overlooked, but all too real to the person who suffers it. When in 1979 a terrified woman appeared on my doorstep desperate to talk to me (a complete stranger) about an experience which was three years old but still giving her nightmares, I knew the size of our task. In this instance my job was *not* primarily to investigate her experience, collate details of what she saw or produce a report. Many investigators. I am sure,

would have simply got on with that. Most of that first session was spent in acting as her counsellor. She desperately needed encouragement and reassurance. I had to calm her quite irrational but natural fears . . . and who else could have done it? Her doctor or a psychiatrist would probably not have had a clue, because they would not be able to accept even the possibility that the stimulus for her anxiety was real, and she would not have accepted their word that it was simply a fantasy.

Today's investigator of the paranormal has been slow to recognise such factors . . . but at last some glimmers of insight are showing. With this in mind, early in 1981 I helped pioneer a move to set up a code of practice for UFO investigators in the UK. We held meetings in Nottingham, London and Swindon to formulate a detailed code, in three sections: our responsibility to the witness, our responsibility to the public and our responsibility to our subject (*). All that now remains is to find an effective way to implement this. Whilst this was designed with ufologists in mind almost all of the code is applicable to the investigation of any anomalous phenomenon. Since I will be helping to co-ordinate ASSAP's team of investigators I have every intention of trying to ensure that a modified version of the code forms a cornerstone of our procedure.

I have no wish to prejudge how things will operate. That will be up to a working party and ASSAP as a whole. But I envisage the possibility of certain things. For example, I hope all ASSAP investigators will *have* to be accredited, which means they will have to prove both capability and their agreement to maintain minimum standards of efficiency. Also, I trust, this will mean that an official ASSAP investigator will have to accept the code (just as a qualified doctor must take his oath of responsibility). All of this will necessarily have to be coupled with an effective training scheme for newcomers.

For too long investigation has been the province of anyone (no matter how little they knew or how little they cared for the person or persons they deal with). I believe ASSAP can set a shining new standard for all to see, proving once and for all that the study of the paranormal can be a respectable and responsible occupation. Indeed, if we are to gain any kind of recognition from the public and the scientific community then the adoption of this attitude is absolutely crucial. The magnitude of our responsibility is as great as that.

(*) The full code of practice is included in *COMMON GROUND* (ASSAP's Journal of record) Issue 2, Aug 1981.

NIGEL BLAIR is Co-ordinator of the Wessex Research Group Network — an outstandingly successful focus for groups and individuals concerned with new areas of research and experiences, and with the unique heritage of Wessex. It has a dozen or so branches ranging widely across Wessex from Devon to Hampshire, and grew spontaneously as a "grass roots" movement based on voluntary work, linking together many previously somewhat isolated groups and creating many new ones. Further information can be obtained from Nigel Blair at telephone [redacted]. Annual subscriptions to their programme is £2.00 and please make cheques payable to "Wessex Research Group". Few people could be better qualified to write an article on ways to form a local group and since there are many infant groups just finding their feet his advice is both timely and practical. He will be glad to answer specific queries and problems. This is the first part of a two part article.

Suggestions for forming a local group

The most difficult step is often the first. We overcame this by simply going ahead and fixing meetings, and publicising them widely, especially with detailed posters — newspaper advertisements seemed to be of very limited value.

We did everything under our own auspices to give flexibility and avoid the problems that can arise if one is affiliated to other organisations who may not approve of all one's ideas. We found it necessary to start with very well known speakers to attract the necessary audiences but we found it much easier to get these than we thought.

In fact we started largely by simply piling up the most interesting recent books we had read and contacting the authors! Publishers will often give the addresses or towns of residence of authors if you explain you are hoping to invite them to speak — or at least they will forward letters.

We found, incidentally, that an initial phone call was best with the letter following afterwards. Authors make for good audiences since people who have read their books often want to meet them.

As for subjects it makes a good impact to start at least with striking areas of new or controversial research. Some of our best audiences were for lectures on reincarnation, dowsing, Atlantis, UFOs, life after death, ley lines, megaliths, ancient mysteries, health and holistic healing, ancient legends related to Wessex, dreams, visions, coincidences, the "New Age" and "higher self guidance".

AUDIENCES

It is important to dispense with all unnecessary details and formalities — eg. formal committee requirements, quorums, excessive division of labour and tickets or bookings for meetings.

It is valuable to enlist if possible the help of local institutions such as libraries and school halls which are often good meeting places.

Don't be too optimistic about initial large audiences — charge enough to cover your costs assuming only twenty or so people turn up. This usually means at least a pound should be collected at the door but with more than one speaker it should be considerably more.

If you get more you can put aside money to finance such things as telephone calls, production of future programmes and posters, petrol, well-known speakers who charge a fee, etc.

It is assumed you will be non-profit making but there is no point in making a loss — and if you do your support may tend to evaporate from those who have to fork out!

Until you have built up a bank balance don't book speakers who charge a professional-sized fee. Many well known people will speak for just expenses plus a token presentation. After all if you publicise it well they gain a great deal of publicity and a chance to air their favourite themes.

Born again - as a writer

Author David Christie-Murray, who recently published **REINCARNATION**, has been talking to ASSAP News about his writing career.

He said: "It was always my ambition to write. As a teenager I wrote poetry and fiction, but the necessity of earning a living and supporting a family prevented me from writing seriously until I retired, and then not the dramas and novels of my dreams."

He explained that of the half-dozen books published since his retirement in 1973, two have dealt with psychic subjects.

"The first, **VOICES FROM THE GODS**, a survey of 'speaking with tongues' in world cultures, arose from research done for a Ph.D. degree which I did not take (happily I got — happily — married instead). The second is also a survey of 'ancient beliefs and modern evidence' for reincarnation.

"Both surveys, written as objectively as I could, aim at presenting their readers in one volume with material edited from hundreds of books and articles. My object is never to convert people" he said.

David was an Anglican priest for 27 years but resigned his orders in 1969. "Partly because I found my mind growing increasingly open as I grew older (it is the inexperienced young who tend to dogmatism, not the still-learning old) and I felt I had no right to tell others what to believe. I found furthermore that the great limitation to almost every viewpoint is that an *honest* man can see arguments equally strong for and against it" he explained.

He emphasised that he neither speaks in tongues nor is a "pro-Reincarnationist writer". However, he does find both subjects exciting.

ASSAP has appointed David ombudsman to adjudicate on any matters that threaten to disrupt the harmonious working of the organisation.

His functions also include staffing matters, ethical considerations and social responsibility.

How to join ASSAP

ASSAP News will be issued every two months free to all members of ASSAP.

The next issue will be ready in early December and will contain details of forthcoming events for ASSAP members and news from some of the regional groups affiliated to ASSAP. It will also include the second part of Nigel Blair's article on how to set up a regional group.

If you wish to join ASSAP please send a stamp only (first or second class) to Membership Secretary Janice Bagnall, [redacted]