

spiritualist periodicals. The mesmerism collection — though this is not now considered so specifically relevant a subject — is even more extensive and goes back to the late 18th century. There are early editions of Mesmer, correspondence between himself and other magnetists, and other material in French, German and English. Dr Gauld mentioned the literature on the 'Seeress of Prevorst' and similar cases of somnambulism and 'magnetic states', during which clairvoyance was sometimes demonstrated. The collection also has many works on hypnotism, including writings by Charcot and his school, reports of experimental work from Germany, and sets of rare periodicals such as the *Zoist*.

Another precursor of psychical research is the collection of poltergeist descriptions in several languages, from as early as the 17th century. Witchcraft, magic, spirits and apparitions belong in this category. Then there is the material on psychopathology: multiple personality, possession, prophecy, ecstasy, glossolalia, even early accounts of near-death experiences. Finally, a small miscellaneous group of sub-collections includes magnetic medicine, dowsing and mediumistic fraud.

The lecturer concluded that, as psychical research will always be more case-oriented than laboratory-oriented, the collections provide invaluable research material. There are a number of well-attested cases on record from well before the SPR set about collecting them — records of unexplained cures, for instance, signed by doctors. When similar phenomena are described over centuries, this carries weight: and comparative and historical studies will always be important in understanding what are the fundamental questions of psychical research.

After lunch there was a tour of the library and in particular of the exhibition of SPR material from the archives. Showcases held a fascinating mixture: early editions of Mesmer, Puységur, and D.D. Home; letters, portraits, and photographs: even a luminous 'spirit trumpet' and a slate with alleged automatic writing on it.

#### Visual Documentation

*Hilary Evans*

Hilary Evans' talk on "Visual Documentation of the Paranormal" tied in well with this exhibition, as he showed some 40 slides ranging from 'spirit photographs' to Borley Rectory to supposed materialisations. With the

photographs, he pointed out, we can seldom be sure just what they prove. The one of psychic surgery, for instance, is almost certainly faked; the gory sight of Therese Neumann's stigmata is real, but may not be paranormal. There were also artists' impressions that made it easier to imagine scenes such as Home's levitations; and some rather dull photos of subjects doing laboratory tests. The visual document, Hilary Evans concluded, is useful but usually not strictly evidential. For the audience it was, at any rate, extremely intriguing.

#### The Cambridge Connection

*Nancy Zingrone*

The afternoon ended with Nancy Zingrone's "Tracing the Cambridge Connection through Parapsychological Literature". She concentrated on two groups that co-operatively produced important work: the half-dozen well-known men at Trinity College, and a group of three women at Newnham. She compared the Trinity group surrounding Sidgwick to a group of geologists, working on evolutionary theory, that has recently been studied: ideas were similarly exchanged, and a kind of community established. The early psychical researchers were extraordinarily productive, considering that they had other work to do as well. Their motivation was much influenced by the religious doubt caused by Darwinism and by German biblical scholarship. At Newnham, the group consisted of Eleanor Sidgwick, Alice Johnson (acting as her secretary), and the classics don Margaret Verrall. Eleanor Sidgwick, who eventually became Principal of Newnham, was given much support by her husband; he also contributed to the founding of Newnham itself. Alice Johnson had a First in Natural Sciences, and became interested in psychical research when working with Mrs Sidgwick. Margaret Verrall, usually mentioned only for her work as a medium, was in fact on the SPR Council. Nancy Zingrone argued that these women, who contributed a great deal to their subject, have in fact been underrated.

A question-and-answer session at the end of the afternoon covering all the talks ranged over a number of rather disconnected subjects — the role of women in psychical research, Helen Duncan, the use of the collection at Cambridge, altered states of consciousness, and early photographic techniques.

*Peter Flew and Rosemary Dinnage*

#### Correction

John Mack, author of *Abduction* (reviewed in PR14 p16) is an MD. Though this was clearly stated in the title of the review we apologise if the text gave the impression that he was a PhD and not an MD.

## Parapsychological Periodicals in Historical Perspective

Carlos Alvarado

It might be supposed that abstract thought can be separated from printed material in an archive, but this is not the case. Archives are active agents of propaganda, enforcing traditions and techniques. As an illustration of this, Carlos Alvarado proposed to talk about the main journals since the 19th century and how they affect our research.

The first volume of the *Proceedings of the SPR* (*ProcSPR*) appeared in 1882; they defined the purpose of the Society and outlined the research programme. The *ProcSPR* was the Society's main means of communication and its influence was reflected in being the most cited reference in other journals. An analysis of the papers published in the *ProcSPR* between 1882 and 1900 shows that it contained case reports, methodological reviews, séance reviews, experimental reports, theoretical concepts and miscellaneous papers. Mrs Sidgwick published recommended methods for investigating cases, along with prescriptions, rules and principles which helped to shape psi research. Her prescriptions, which included publishing failures as well as successes, avoiding sensory cues and detecting fraud, helped to chart the future of the field.

A few of the most important of the many foreign journals were then reviewed.

The *Journal of the American SPR* (*JASPR*) started publishing in 1907 and still continues. In the early years it is a good example of one person promoting his views. James Hyslop was the dominant figure and he was the author of 67% of the published papers. In these he promoted his personal views on psi phenomena; he even used book reviews to mercilessly attack opponents. The Margery mediumship was promoted and this helped to set the research agenda.

The *Journal of Parapsychology* (*JP*) started in 1937 and still continues. Rhine used the *JP* to publish his experimental and statistical papers, and to advertise his laboratory-based approach. During the period 1937-46 the *JP* contained 52% experimental papers compared with the *JASPR*'s 11%. No spontaneous cases were published in the *JP* and there was a break with mediumistic research. The *JP* allowed Rhine to share his research; in his way he was as dominant as Hyslop. The *JP* published Rhine's editorials and articles on research techniques, and the applications of research: Rhine said how important the *JP* was in educating newcomers to the field. Rhine's books, critical of the *SPR*, espoused experimental science and set the research priorities. Rhine labelled certain areas, for example mediumship and Kirlian photography, as not being worthy of research. He was influential in determining the direction of research.

Included amongst journals of a different character are: *Luce e Ombra*, still being published

in Italy, and dealing with metaphysics; *Revista Medica de Metapsiquica*, only four volumes of which were published in 1947, and which brought together medicine, psi research and psychiatry.

The *Skeptical Inquirer* (*SI*) is a modern journal aimed at debunking psi. It is one-sided, anti-psi and all the articles are of similar styles and opinions. It represents scientific orthodoxy. The *SI* is critical. The percentage of research articles published during the period 1982-1991 were *SI* 10%, *JP* 40% and *JASPR* 40%. The speaker felt *SI* seemed to be interested in controversy and not in whether psi is real.

*Parapsicologia* (*Pp*), published in Brazil, is like the *SI* but less sceptical. In part it reflects the views of the Catholic Church. It seeks to destroy Spiritualism and to attack spiritualist hospitals and universities. The *Pp* seeks to reduce spiritualistic influence, it disapproves of psi research and believes that Ganzfeld and séances are harmful, and it debunks materialisation phenomena. It does accept psi up to a point, but only in so far as it supports Roman Catholic miracles, healing and exorcism. The *Pp* sets particular limits to psi and anything beyond that is supernatural.

There are many other journals. Journals shape our ideas and research programmes. We must be aware of the conceptual baggage attached to a journal. It is necessary to know the context of a journal in order to estimate what it can tell us.

### Rare Books

Dr Alan Gauld

Dr Alan Gauld's interesting talk on "Rare Books in the SPR Collection" outlined its history and the subjects that were included. He was not, he said, going to touch on books actually about psychical research but on those, mostly published before the Society's founding, that were concerned with its background and antecedents. A nucleus of about 180 books was first donated by Sidgwick; then, after Edmund Gurney's death, a fund was established in his name to increase the library. This was organised by Myers' brother. Dr Gauld described the excitement of finding notes in Myers' own handwriting in book margins! From the 1920s, the library was in the hands of Theodore Besterman, a distinguished bibliographer. With his advice, money was spent on acquiring valuable rare works. Dr Gauld also touched on the sad subject of the losses and thefts that tended to happen during moves. There were once, for instance, several early copies of Braid's *Neurhypnology*, which nowadays could fetch about £1,000 a copy. The SPR books at Cambridge are now kept locked up, and the University Library has been able to replace a few of the recently stolen books.

Dr Gauld went on to describe the several subject categories. On spiritualism, there is a good collection of early works from America and Britain from the 1860s onwards, and runs of

## STUDY DAY

**The Archives & Early Literature of Psychical Research — The Cambridge Connection**

*Report on the Second SPR Regional Study Day which took place in Cambridge on the 15th October 1994*

**The Value of Archives in Investigating Spontaneous Psychic Experiences**

*Professor Donald West*

The earliest evidence for psychic phenomena comes from spontaneous cases; it was these that the SPR founders collected. Spontaneous cases preclude the experimental approach, but patterns can be seen when cases are collected together. The SPR archives are one of the most important collections of reported, witnessed and assessed psychic cases.

A minority of spontaneous cases involve changes to the physical environment, for example poltergeist cases, but the SPR founders chose to concentrate on apparitions. This may have been because physical phenomena have often been exposed as fraud, but it was also because apparitions suggest survival of physical death. Most apparitions are described as visitations of human figures which are experienced in a normal environment by wide-awake people.

The early SPR work included *Phantasms of the Living*, 1886, *Census of Hallucinations*, 1890, and Mrs Sidgwick's collection of cases in 1923. Professor West published his critical assessment of the evidential value of the early case collections in *Investigation of Spontaneous Cases*, 1948. Salter, in reviewing this book, thought that the early SPR founders were well aware of the weaknesses in their cases. Since then many evaluations of the early cases have produced conclusions ranging from unconvicted to convinced.

Cases are difficult to assess. A 1948 case reported that hypnosis had been used to induce the appearance of an apparition; this was accepted as genuine at the time but was subsequently admitted as fraud. A modern case concerned a premonition of the Kings Cross fire. This was reported by a scientist but was not backed up by witnesses. Other cases begin to look more dubious when it is realised that they are reported by spiritualists who regularly report psychic experiences.

Only a small number of the total population of experiences reach the archives, and the well collaborated cases represent only a few percent of the total. A survey of unselected cases is revealing.

**% of the Population Experiencing Hallucinations**

1890 Census	10%
1948 Mass Observation	14%
1982 SPR	35%
1988 West	11%
1994 BBC	22%

The original SPR survey showed many more hallucinations occurring than expected: 10% of the population experienced them, and more recent surveys have shown even higher figures, as shown in the table below. (The last figure there was the result of a telephone survey.) In general, more

women than men report experiences, and a sizeable number of people report more than one experience.

Most apparitions were of human figures, some recognised, some unknown and some of persons still living. Many apparitions were unconnected with external events, but the connections with deaths were greater than might be expected by chance. The age of the witness reporting the psi event is significant, as people tend to forget old experiences from long ago. The cases of coincidence happened longer ago, while the over-representation of cases occurring within plus or minus twelve hours of death were reported closer to the time of occurrence. Many deaths are expected, for example of elderly or ill people, but Salter, who analysed such issues, concluded that the number of cases was still greater than that expected by chance. However, there may be an element of exaggeration in the case reports, and not many cases have been reported in recent years. Violent deaths are still common, for example traffic accidents, but they do not generate the expected number of case reports.

The early investigators had narrower conceptual limits, but the modern investigator has also to consider altered states, multiple personality, reincarnation, false memories, etc. The question of the reliability of evidence has to be considered. Often the people who believe in psi have multiple experiences, and it seems that belief in the paranormal renders people more likely to experience phenomena. Two explanations seem possible: first, a minority of the population experience paranormal phenomena, or, second, people with greater imagination are making frequent claims.

Experiences should be reported to the SPR straight away. It may be that once-in-a-lifetime experiences are more reliable. The investigator should look for confirmation of reports, especially from fantasy-prone individuals, and should investigate the social and psychological situation of the paranormal events. The mental processes of those who believe in the paranormal need to be studied. Building a useful archive requires good investigators, reliable witnesses, reports which include the events leading up to the psi event, and the inclusion in the archive of the less well authenticated cases.

During the discussion period, Professor West was asked about experiences connected with drugs and drink. He thought that these were of a different character from psi experiences. It was possible that LSD increased the occurrence of psi, but he was not aware of any surveys to confirm this. In connection with fantasy prone individuals, it is possible that they are the creative individuals and most likely to experience psi, but we don't know if this is true.