

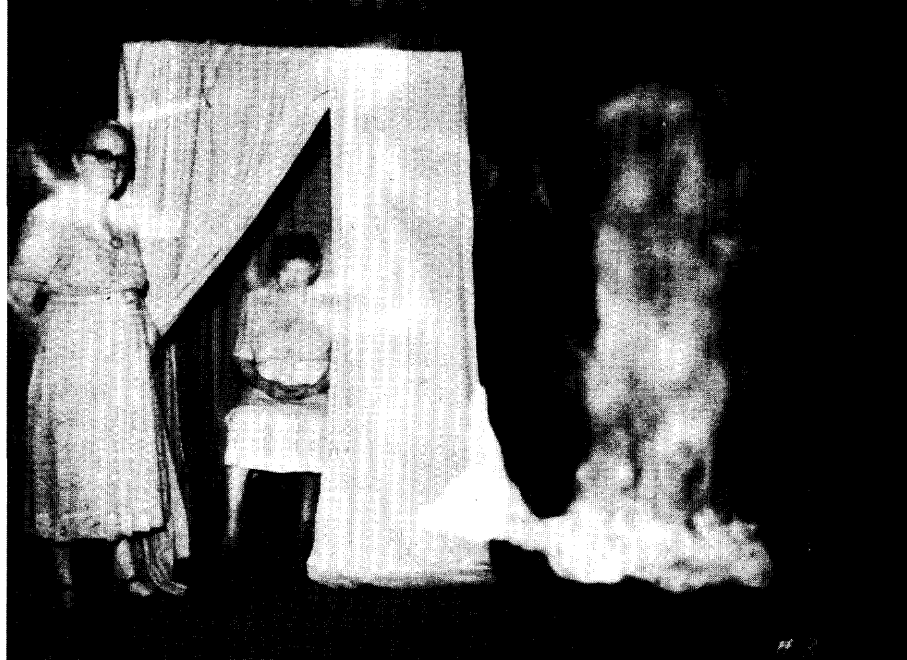
THE SPR CAMBRIDGE ARCHIVE

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THE MEMBERS OF OUR SOCIETY are no doubt aware of the facilities that are available to them at the main office in South Kensington, but I wonder whether they are appreciative of the mass of material that is also accessible in the archive held at the Cambridge University Library. This not only includes thousands of manuscripts, journals, and letters, but also a large collection of books.

The effort of gaining entrance to the library is well worth the minor inconvenience. Students and graduates of Cambridge University already hold a reader's ticket, but a letter from either another university department or our own society usually allows access to the Manuscripts Room where a considerable amount of material can be viewed after it has been brought up from the vaults. The procedure is as follows:

1. Send a letter to the Manuscripts Room of the Cambridge University Library (West Road, Cambridge CB3 9DR Website: <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk>. Tel: 01223 333000), ideally with a covering letter from either a university or the SPR.
2. Try to give a time and date when a visit is desired and to save time an idea of what material is to be scrutinised.
3. Await a reply and then arrive at the library accordingly with covering letters.
4. Bring only pencils and writing paper. Cases etc. will have to be deposited in lockers. For a first visit you may be taken to the Manuscripts Room or be directed there.
5. Ask to see a catalogue of the SPR material



or tell the person in charge (currently Peter Meadows) what you wish to see.

6. Fill in a library slip and hand it to the desk for items to be collected for you. (This may involve a wait at busy times.)
7. Some photocopying may be available depending on the condition of the items scrutinised.

I have been undertaking part-time work on behalf of the SPR organising and conserving manuscripts held at the library since 2002 and the work is ongoing. The results of my work can be found in catalogues held at the library in Cambridge and in London. Since currently (July 2005) the entries comprise over 50,000 words it is not possible here to give anything but a small flavour of what can be found there, but major subjects would certainly include survival material and mediumship, apparitions and poltergeists, and ESP. Most of the material dates from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but since the archive is constantly added to, more recent material is often included in the collection. Since the archive has also been placed on disk it can also be accessed using a search engine simply by putting a key word or name into the source.

Survival material and mediumship

Alphabetical lists of mediums and investigations of mediumship provide detailed information about sittings either reported or given by such outstanding characters as Sir William Barrett, Madame Blavatsky, Sir William Crookes, Rev. Drayton Thomas, Eva Carriere (Eva C.), Eileen Garrett, D. D. Home, Mrs Leonard, Sir Oliver Lodge, Mrs Crandon (Margery), F. W. H. Myers, Eusapia Palladino and Mrs Piper. Less celebrated characters, but nonetheless colourful, include Mrs Merton (and her flying armchair) and Mrs Bulford and her spirit guide ... a donkey! There are also many pages of automatic writing and drawings. The huge amount of material in this section alone gives significant support to the notion that the SPR's early investigators of mediums were far more careful in their research than they are sometimes given credit for. Reading the correspondence that the archive contains would considerably reward a contemporary researcher wishing to delve into the minds of the pioneers of the SPR.

Apparitions and poltergeists

A geographical alphabetical list allows the researcher of these phenomena to pinpoint exactly what is where. For instance, my own county (Essex) contains entries for Bardfield, Barkingside, Basildon, Brightlingsea, Canvey Island, Chingford, Colchester, Dagenham, Debden, Dovercourt, Epping, Feering, Great Chesterford, Great Leighs etc. The entries are not restricted to the United Kingdom since there are examples from all around the world – Africa, America, Australia, Europe, India, etc. Notorious cases are particularly well represented with several files devoted to, for instance, Borley Rectory and the 'Enfield Poltergeist'. Laboriously sifting through the vast number of cases devoted to people's experiences of apparitions and poltergeist activity is encouraging to the researcher seeking to find a variety of different phenomena in these categories.

ESP

Throughout the twentieth century members of the SPR conducted a large number of experiments in an effort to untangle the anomalies of extra-sensory perception. The archive contains a wealth of material

concerning these experiments, the results and the people who conducted and participated in them. Again there are far too many to mention every case and a few examples must suffice, which include Ken Batcheldor's macro-PK experiments, Whately Carington's thought transference research (twenty-four boxes of it!), Anita Gregory's experiments (notably with Matthew Manning), S. G. Soal's research, the Schneider brothers' investigations, and Donald West's prolific research.

Miscellaneous

I have been surprised at the wide range of different subjects that the SPR has investigated during the last one hundred and twenty years, and although fashions in psychical research have changed during this time, a number of phenomena still seem to be relevant today. The Andrew MacKenzie Collection provides a comprehensive guide to alleged time slips and the so-called 'Versailles Case' is well documented. Such diverse subjects as Bligh Bond's psychic archaeology in Glastonbury, the Bélmez faces in Spain and the Fairfield papers on witchcraft can be found. The recent donation of Mostyn Gilbert's files provides considerable evidence of the difficulties that can arise with different investigators researching the same cases simultaneously. No doubt some current Council members can remember some of the problems encountered, and the minutes and other documents of meetings from bygone years remind one that in any group of half a dozen psychical researchers a dozen different opinions will be held!

Newspaper cuttings, photographic material and objects

The archive contains many newspaper cuttings, pictures, glass slides and photographs of phenomena that have been included in the above discussion. Many correspondents included photographs of the apparition they believed they had seen, and in the heyday of Spiritualism photographs were often taken of mediums and their alleged ectoplasm manifestations. Newspaper articles provide further evidence of all these activities. The kindly donation by the Freiburg Institute of the Cyril Permutt Collection has increased the photographic and newspaper cutting archive considerably. It is currently undergoing

conservation (July 2005) but it is estimated to contain in the region of two thousand photographs of apparitions, spirit manifestations, psychokinetic effects and even some UFO material that the SPR normally does not investigate. The Cambridge archive does not contain many films or audio recordings since these are mainly held in London, but a few examples of alleged ectoplasm and other artefacts can be found. These include moulds of Margery and Walter's thumb impressions, spirit trumpets and a cast of D. D. Home's hand.



Conclusion

Question: Who should use the SPR archive in Cambridge?

Answer: Anyone who has an interest in psychical research or parapsychology is an obvious answer and if you are a member of the SPR and you have not taken a look then I am frankly amazed. However, I would also encourage you to make use of this facility if you wish to increase your knowledge of English social history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In terms of literature there

are private letters from luminaries such as Yeats and Conan Doyle and the academic world is very well represented by F. W. H. Myers, Professor E. R. Dodds, Sir Oliver Lodge, Sir William Crookes and many others. Music is represented by information about the musical medium Rosemary Brown and a photographer would revel in the amount of early material present. Many of the newspaper articles have not been detached from the complete newspaper, thus providing information from the past from a number of different viewpoints in countries around the world.

In short, YOU should use the SPR archive!

PRESIDENT'S NOTE ON THE 2005 CONFERENCE

JOHN POYNTON

THE FUTURE OF THE SPR, and of psychical research in general, has come under much discussion over the past year. What signs about future directions can be gathered from the 2005 SPR international conference at the University of Bath?

There were several things that struck me as being significant pointers. Foremost perhaps was the number of people at the conference whom I would classify as being 'young'. Among the presenters of papers, there were twice as many young people as there were 'not-so-young'.

There was generally an excellent standard of presentation, with liberal and creative use made of PowerPoint systems. No less than eight

universities were represented by young staff or graduate students. There was a decided tendency for presenters to make contact with the real world: attention was paid to surrounding physical and even cosmological conditions, and laboratory-based researchers generally showed an interest in the fact that every experiment is a life-experience both for the subject and for the investigator. Several papers had strong experiential and ethnographic bases.

This tendency could lead to personal involvement, which may interfere with objective data-collection. On the other hand the paradigm of the remote, aloof, generalising scientist can lead to a failure to harvest data in psychical research if the paradigm is pressed too far. It