

Archive of the Society for Psychical Research

The Society for Psychical Research maintains a substantial archive consisting of articles, correspondence, photographs, audio-visual material, artefacts, equipment and journals – all collected since its foundation in 1882. This is in addition to two libraries containing many thousands of books.

The documents and audio-visual material are held in Cambridge University Library and a Norfolk private address respectively, where they can be visited by arrangement. Availability and copying may be restricted in some cases, and visitors are advised to check first with the SPR's London office or archive officer.

History

The [Society for Psychical Research](#) (SPR) was founded in 1882, mainly by a Cambridge group of scholars. Many members donated their works and correspondence to the SPR, either during their lifetimes or as legacies. The resulting archive grew rapidly and was maintained at the society's offices in London, which changed location several times. During World War II twelve large packing cases of material were temporarily transferred to the home of Lord Rayleigh in Essex for safe-keeping.^[1] In 1957 the SPR moved to 1 Adam and Eve Mews in West London, by which time the archive had become too big to be effectively maintained there. The problem was resolved in 1989, when Cambridge University Library (CUL) agreed to house the archive as an ongoing collection and also to catalogue the SPR's collection of ancient and rare books.^[2]

At around the same time, arrangements were made to house photographs and drawings with the Mary Evans Picture Library, a historical picture archive run by Hilary Evans, a leading SPR member. These continue to the present day.^[3]

Attempts in the 1980s to bring order to the archive failed for lack of funding. In 2002 the task was entrusted to Melvyn Willin, the present archive officer, who created a large-scale catalogue of material held at CUL. Willin continues regularly to deposit new items, while supervising access and copying.

Researchers may visit the archive and make copies of items according to the SPR/CUL guidelines. In addition to this the archivist at CUL (currently Frank Bowles) and at the SPR (currently Melvyn Willin) are available to answer queries concerning the contents of the archive and its accessibility. (See below).

In addition to the CUL archive and library, a large audio-visual collection is held in a separate building at Willin's home in Norfolk (see below).

Contents

The materials held at CUL consist of journals, correspondence, published/unpublished articles, cuttings, photographs, artwork and artefacts. Audio-visual

items are situated in Norfolk, consisting mainly of cassette tapes (many of which have been digitized), VHS video tapes and DVDs.

Cambridge University Library

Under the management of CUL's Manuscripts Department^[4] a large number of topics are presented from the late nineteenth century up to the present day. The manuscripts collection fills 160 linear metres. Very little has been digitized. However, photographs of objects such as a séance trumpet, 'ectoplasm', wax thumbprints and a cast of the hand of DD Home can be found in the Cambridge University Digital Library.^[5]

The collection up to 2015 is catalogued in detail on the ArchiveSearch database.^[6] Cataloguing of more recent acquisitions is ongoing.

Topics

The following is a list of some of the main topics covered in the archive.

(Readers searching for particular topics are advised to use more than one keyword: for instance, 'psychokinesis' or 'PK' will also bring up items relating to poltergeists.)

- Animals/ ANPSI. Donald West's Research Files and the [John Randall](#) Collection both contain unpublished material on these subjects.
- Apparitions/ hauntings. The section labelled 'Hauntings & Poltergeists' lists hundreds of unpublished cases with detailed information and geographical locations. In addition to this list there are numerous accounts scattered throughout the archive.
- Automatic writing/ drawing. Over one hundred references, with examples, from well-known cases such as [Bligh Bond at Glastonbury](#), as well as obscure examples including writing in unknown languages (for instance the glossolalia of Joan Anderson reported by [David Christie-Murray](#) in 1986).
- Borley Rectory. A major collection of correspondence generated by individuals involved in the [Borley Rectory](#) haunting case during and after its investigation.
- Clairvoyance. Examples of experiments and their results, often unpublished, including [Count Solovovo](#) with 'Nadia', the 'Helen McCabe' Case and Frances Campbell, among many others.
- Coincidences. [Donald West's](#) Research Files contains unpublished examples of meaningful coincidences.
- Crop circles. A wealth of newspaper articles covering many examples of this phenomenon, highlighted by [Ralph Noyes](#).
- Cross Correspondences. Mostly hand-written notes by JG Piddington concerning the scripts of Mrs Willett, Mrs Verrall and Mrs Wilson.
- Dowsing. Reports and accounts of several types of dowsing (including water and maps) under experimental conditions.
- Dreams. Includes examples of precognitive dreams and dream books compiled by Rev JP Hill.

- [Enfield poltergeist](#). The complete Grosse and Playfair collection of correspondence, cuttings and articles. (See also 'audio-visual')
- ESP. Written accounts of experiments by Theodora Bosanquet, Betty Humphrey, Donald West and others. Also miscellaneous experimental apparatus, cuttings and articles.
- Healing. Multiple accounts about healers and anomalous healing effects, by scientists including [Lawrence LeShan](#) and Emilio Servadio, and mediums including Geoff Boltwood.
- Hypnotism. Seven detailed files concerning experiments and investigations by the SPR's nineteenth century Hypnosis Experiments Committee.
- Materialisations. Photographs and articles, relating among others to EE Fournier d'Albe's investigation of the Belfast [Goligher Circle](#) and Juliette Bisson's investigation of [Marthe Beraud](#) ('Eva C')
- Mediums. Hundreds of articles, letters and photographs relating to mediums, both well-known and obscure, and their investigation by psychical researchers. A large collection concerns the [DD Home](#) correspondence and papers.
- [Near-death-experiences](#) and out-of-body-experiences. Unpublished accounts, articles from journals and newspaper cuttings.
- [Poltergeists](#). The section labelled Hauntings & Poltergeists lists hundreds of unpublished cases with detailed information and geographical locations. Numerous other accounts are scattered throughout the archive.
- [Postmortem Survival](#). As a major focus of the SPR this has generated much archive material. Of particular interest are the HH Price Collections, the TE Wood, [Oliver Lodge](#) and [Thouless](#) survival tests, Eileen Ransom's survival papers, post-mortem survival tests and survival research projects by [Anita Gregory](#) and [William Roll](#).
- Predictions/ premonitions. Many examples of predictions relating to horse racing, wars and catastrophes, and suchlike, also the contents of a container of survival messages discovered in 2007.
- [Psychic photography](#). Rare collections of photographs (including glass plates) of mediums, psychical researchers, experiments, equipment, apparitions, auras and ectoplasm. Also photographs recently received from the Society for the Study of Supernormal Pictures, and other large compilations such as the Cyril Permutt collection (seventeen albums) and William Hope (seven boxes).
- [Psychokinesis](#). The John Randall collection, Betty Humphrey and a section of Donald West's Research Files provide details of unpublished experiments. The notebooks of the [Batchelder experiments](#) were recently acquired. Numerous other reports, correspondence and articles relating to psychokinesis are found throughout the archive.
- [Reincarnation](#). The Clarice Toyne collection contains numerous examples and unpublished discussion about reincarnation. Also includes letters by leading researcher [Ian Stevenson](#).
- Religious phenomena. Articles, cuttings and correspondence relating to Lourdes miracles, stigmata, bleedings statues, matters pertaining to 'science and religion', etc.

- Séances. Unpublished notes and correspondence about séances held by [Helen Duncan](#), Josephine Drews, Mrs Thompson, [Marthe Beraud](#) ('Eva C'), [Eusapia Palladino](#), [DD Home](#), [Mina Crandon](#), [Rudi Schneider](#), [Borley Rectory](#) and many others.
- Societies devoted to psi research. Lists and correspondence relating to organisations such as the Manchester Psychical Research Society (1952), the Theosophical Society and the [American Society for Psychical Research](#).^[7]
- Spiritualism. Correspondence, articles, journals and cuttings about all the mainstream activities within the spiritualistic movement and their investigation. One of the largest sections in the archive.
- SPR history/ administration. Original documents, minutes of meetings and accounts dating from the beginning of the Society.
- Telepathy. A large number of newspaper cuttings, journal articles and letters describing reported cases of telephone telepathy, animal telepathy, long distance telepathy, and [twin telepathy](#), also card-guessing telepathy tests.
- [Witchcraft](#). In the SPR's early years witchcraft and its possible relation to psychic phenomena were discussed in articles and correspondence. The archive contains material on the subject by Letitia Fairfield and [Manfred Cassirer](#), and is also mentioned in [Donald West's](#) Research Files.

Researchers

Archive material relating to individual researchers includes the following (see Willin (2005) for a more comprehensive list).

- Balfour family. The Mary Balfour Crystal (Ball) collection and the Kremer collection contain numerous letters by [Balfour](#) family members. Further examples are found throughout the archive.
- William Barrett. The [William Barrett](#) papers contain his correspondence with [Frederic Myers](#), [Henry Sidgwick](#), [Eleanor Sidgwick](#), [Mark Twain](#), [William Crookes](#), [F Bligh Bond](#), [Oliver Lodge](#), and others. Topics covered include telepathy experiments with the [Creery family](#), [dowsing](#), Reichenbach phenomena and sittings with [Gladys Leonard](#).
- [Mary Rose Barrington](#). Correspondence and research notes held in 26 boxes. Topics covered include the Enfield poltergeist, [Scole mediumship circle](#), Iris Farczady, [Jenny Cockell](#) (reincarnation), [remote viewing](#), [psychometry](#) and [Jott \(phenomena of spatial discontinuities\)](#).
- [Kenneth Batchelder](#). Fifty-three notebooks provide the details of his table-tilting experiments carried out between 1966 and 1988. The archive also contains research notes of cases he investigated and an unpublished interview with [Guy Lyon Playfair](#).
- [Martha Beraud](#) ('Eva C'). Dozens of letters about her mediumship written by investigators [Everard Feilding](#), [Helen Salter](#), Albert Schrenck-Notzing, [Count Solovovo](#), [William McDougall](#), [EJ Dingwall](#) and [Guy Lambert](#).
- Theodora Bosanquet. Letters and notebooks about sittings she attended from the 1920s to the 1940s, notably with [Gladys Leonard](#). Bosanquet was employed as amanuensis by the novelist Henry James, brother of [William James](#).

- CD Broad. The writings and correspondence of the Cambridge philosopher [CD Broad](#) can be found throughout the archive, in particular concerning the life, work and death of [Edmund Gurney](#).
- [W Whately Carington](#). His papers provide details of his quantitative study of trance personalities, experiments on the paranormal cognition of drawings, and his correspondence with [Rosalind Heywood](#).
- Hereward Carrington. Donald West's Research Files contain correspondence written between 1900 and 1940, some of it with notable individuals, also letters concerning the American physical medium [Margery Crandon](#).
- [Manfred Cassirer](#). Twenty-three files of correspondence and articles concerning materialization mediumship, [Helen Duncan](#), the Bromley poltergeist, witchcraft, and his own investigations.
- [AD Cornell](#). Details of his many investigations of apparitions and poltergeists, much of it carried out with the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research (CUSPR).
- [Margery \(Mina\) Crandon](#). The Crandon collection contains twelve files of unpublished correspondence, reports and cuttings from many of the researchers involved in her mediumship.
- [William Crookes](#). A collection of letters, articles and other papers, including a bound book of records of investigative séances held with [DD Home](#) in London in 1870 and 1871. Many more of his letters are found throughout the archive.
- [ER Dodds](#). Nineteen folders of correspondence and articles on subjects reflecting his broad interests, notably 'supernormal antiquities' and mental mediumship.
- [Arthur Conan Doyle](#). Letters written by Doyle are found throughout the archive, including some concerning the [Cottingley fairies case](#).
- Mostyn Gilbert. Substantial correspondence concerning the mediums George Valiantine, Annie Eva Fay and Rosina Showers, also miscellaneous psi subjects.
- [Anita Gregory](#). Details of work with [Matthew Manning](#) and letters, articles and photos about [parapsychology in Russia](#), and notes about the Austrian medium [Rudi Schneider](#). Other of her papers are found elsewhere in the archive under other headings.
- [Alan Gauld](#). Extensive correspondence and investigative reports on a large range of topics. An individual section is devoted to the [Scole](#) phenomena.
- [Mollie Goldney](#). A large quantity of written material concerning mediums, the Soal-Shackleton experiments and Borley rectory. Her extensive correspondence can be found scattered elsewhere throughout the archive.
- [Maurice Grosse](#). The [Enfield](#) poltergeist collection and other investigations.
- [Richard Hodgson](#). Extensive correspondence about [Leonora Piper](#), also papers relating to his investigation of Helena Blavatsky. The collection also contains correspondence with the Sidwicks and unpublished personal diaries.
- [DD Home](#). One of the largest collections, which includes correspondence, articles, reports, and photographs, also a cast of his left hand. A bronze bust and an accordion said to have been played by spirits during his séances are kept in the London library.

- [Montague Keen](#). A large quantity of papers and correspondence, notably concerning the Scole phenomena, the Jacqui Poole case and the Cema investigation. [Owing to copyright issues this material is currently unavailable – please apply to the archive officer for more information.]
- [Gladys Leonard](#). A collection of letters and papers relating to research sittings carried out throughout the twentieth century. Sittings transcripts and other material are also found elsewhere in the archive.
- [Oliver Lodge](#). Correspondence with other researchers, providing details of his own activities in psychical research. A section is devoted to failed attempts between 1940 and 1954 to identify the contents of a sealed message left by Lodge as proof of his having survived death.
- RG Medhurst – Substantial writings, cuttings, articles and correspondence on topics, including material relating to the physical medium Florence Cook.
- [Frederic Myers](#). The archive contains much material relating to the SPR's co-founder and leading theorist, including correspondence and unpublished scripts, autobiographical information, notes about early investigations, and physical phenomena obtained in a family spiritualist circle.
- [Eusapia Palladino](#). Information and correspondence by numerous researchers about sittings with the Italian physical medium, also reports, cuttings and photographs.
- [Leonora Piper](#). Detailed accounts of research sittings with Piper, also newspaper cuttings, articles and photographs.
- [Harry Price](#). Correspondence and photographs of experiments. Transcripts of his own papers and cuttings notably [Borley Rectory](#) and [Rudi Schneider](#).
- [JB Priestley](#). Letters, articles and booklets mainly about precognition, with details of his 1963-1965 survey.
- [Lord Rayleigh](#). Correspondence notably with [Frederic Myers](#), [Eleanor Sidgwick](#) and [Theodore Besterman](#), with accompanying notes.
- [Serena Roney-Dougal](#). Documentary and audio-visual material relating to experimental work with meditators in a yoga ashram and with psi-induced seed growth.
- [William Salter](#). Voluminous letters, articles and reports on a wide range of subjects including [Borley Rectory](#), the [Cross-correspondences](#)^[8] and the investigation of mediums. (Note: search mentions of 'Salter' may also refer to his wife [Helen \(Verrall\) Salter](#).)
- [Rudi Schneider](#). A major collection containing reports and correspondence about the investigation of his physical mediumship. A further file concerns [EJ. Dingwall's](#) investigation of his brother Willy Schneider.
- [Eleanor Sidgwick](#). Sidgwick contributed a large amount of material to the archive, including her correspondence and reports. She was joint investigator of the 'Hacking Case', examined the 'book tests' carried out with Gladys Leonard, and corresponded with leading researchers about mental mediumship and apparitions.
- [SG Soal](#). Considerable correspondence concerning Soal's telepathy tests, with all the individuals who were directly involved and with his critics. There is also information about his pre-experimental telepathy work.
- [Donald West](#). A considerable collection of papers, by and about a researcher whose activities in the field spanned almost eight decades. The greater part

concerns his investigation of SG Soal. It also includes correspondence about miscellaneous cases: psychometry, telepathy, (including an unpublished article with [Robert Thouless](#), and a mass telepathy experiment), mediums, [Scole](#), an ESP and drawings experiment, and much of the content of his own 'Research Files'.

Audio-visual Collection

The SPR audio-visual collection is housed in a separate building at the home of the archive officer in Norfolk, UK. It consists of a large number of audio-cassettes and VHS videos, as well as a few audio reel-to-reel tapes, audio CDs and DVDs.

Audio

Most of the audio-cassettes are copies of talks and lectures given to the SPR over the last half century. Many have been digitized. (Note: unfortunately, the titles of the talks do not always make the contents clear.)

Cassette tapes donated by [Maurice Grosse](#) and [Guy Playfair](#) are recordings made during their investigation of the [Enfield poltergeist](#).

Playfair also donated recordings of his many interviews with Uri Geller during the preparation of their joint book *The Geller Effect* (1986).^[9]

Serena Roney-Dougal has donated cassette recordings of meditations from her work in an ashram. The Ransom tapes are séance recordings from a Spiritualist circle. Recordings of talks by Clarice Toyne are on a reel-to-reel format.

Videos

The videos section includes silent black-and-white film footage of [Eleanore Zugun](#), [Ninel Kulagina](#), [Jose Arigo](#) and the Indian rope-trick. There is also an early SPR recording of a Zener card ESP test held at the society's offices.

Video diaries recorded by Maurice Grosse, some of them featured in a television programme, give insights into the work of a successful inventor and his approach to psychical research. The films also contain rare footage of interviews with the Hodgson family at the centre of the Enfield disturbances, also an interview with Terry Wilkins, the son of 'Bill' Wilkins (supposed to have been the entity that allegedly spoke through the teenaged Janet Hodgson).

More recent colour films with audio include the Iris Farczady case recorded by Mary Rose Barrington and the Drinkwater case investigated by her and Grosse.

Brief videos donated by Alan Gauld record anomalies observed during his investigations.

Access

A Cambridge University Library reader's card is required to access the SPR's documents archive. This can be obtained from the CUL registration department

with photographic ID and proof of current address.

Access is free for SPR members and members of UK universities; for all others, a card is free for seven consecutive days within any twelve-month period. There is a £5 administration charge for one month, £15 for six months, £30 for twelve months, or £90 for three years (2023 prices).^[10]

Readers may take pictures of the material for their personal research. The Digital Content Unit can provide copying services if higher quality images are required.^[11]

Licensing applications must be made through the same department and fees may apply except when publications are to be used in academic articles.

Researchers intending to reproduce materials must obtain copyright permissions from the SPR and make appropriate acknowledgements.

Arrangements to visit the audio-visual collections in Norfolk, and to view or listen to material, may be made with the archive officer Melvyn Willin. Copying is limited to material owned by the SPR and is for academic purposes only, copying equipment to be brought by the visitor.

Books

Books belonging to the SPR are housed in Cambridge University Library and at the library at its London offices.^[12] The online library can be accessed by members via an external website.^[13]

Future Research

The shifting focus of parapsychology towards experimental work in recent decades has led to a relative decline in the quantity of contributions to the archive. However, documents, audiovisual material and other items relating to survival research, reincarnation, near-death experiences, along with reports of spontaneous phenomena, including hauntings and poltergeists, are likely to remain an important part of new content. Parapsychologists active in these and other areas are encouraged to donate material for the benefit of future researchers, investigators and authors. In the long term, digitization and other improvements are expected to make the archives more accessible.

Melvyn Willin

Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

1. ^ Murphy (1946-49), 331.

2. ^ West (2016), 12.

3. ^ Notes and notices (1978), 769.

4. ^ <https://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

5. ^ <https://imaging-services.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

6. ^ <https://archivesearch.lib.cam.ac.uk/repositories/2/resources/13400>

7. ^ Other societies are discussed in the *Paranormal Review* (2014) 72.

8. ^ Ruickbie (2022).

9. ^ Geller & Playfair (1986).

10. ^ Cambridge University Library.

11. ^ Prices are available from <https://imaging-services.lib.cam.ac.uk/>

12. ^ Details are available from library@lib.cam.ac.uk (CUL) or library@spr.ac.uk (SPR).

13. ^ <http://www.lexscien.org/lexscien/index.jsp>