

WW Baggally

William Wortley Baggally (c 1848–1928) was a psychical researcher with interests in telepathy and the physical phenomena of spiritualism. He is remembered in particular for his participation in the 1908 investigation of Eusapia Palladino in Naples.

Psychical Research

WW Baggally became interested in the claims of spiritualist mediums and decided to investigate them himself. He attended many private sittings, according to his obituarist, without ever being convinced of having witnessed supernormal phenomena.¹ Dissatisfied with the standards of evidence generally accepted by spiritualists, in 1896 he joined the [Society for Psychical Research](#) (SPR), where his expertise in conjuring was acknowledged as a valuable asset; six years later he became a member of its Council.²

Telepathy Experiments

By 1902 Baggally was participating as agent or observer in experiments and public exhibitions of telepathy.³ He carried out drawing experiments out with a ‘private lady’ in the SPR premises, in which she accurately reproduced diagrams that were being looked at by himself and another person behind an opaque screen. He also examined famous mentalist acts. One, a stage performer named Yoga Rama, he considered to be fraudulent, attributing his ability to name objects held in front of him to a practised ability to see beneath a blindfold. But he was deeply impressed by performances given by Danish-born Julius Zancig and his wife Agnes, both in public performances and in private investigations, in which she acted as percipient, identifying with consistent accuracy words and objects shown to him at some distance. Baggally stated that he was quite unable to discover the use of a fraudulent method involving codes, since on many occasions Julius used only one or two words, insufficient to carry coded information to Agnes, and sometimes he was silent. He concluded that the couple’s ability was far in advance of anything yet observed in the most successful experiments carried out with other people by the SPR. However, he withheld final judgement until he was able to test their ability by placing them in separate rooms.

Mediums

[Eusapia Palladino](#) was an Italian medium who failed tests by SPR researchers at Cambridge, but whose séance phenomena remained of interest to many European scientists.⁴ In 1908, Baggally accompanied [Hereward Carrington](#) and [Everard Feilding](#) to Naples for a repeat investigation on behalf of the SPR. The trio observed hundreds of anomalous incidents (raps, levitation of objects, plucking of guitar strings, untying knots and suchlike) over the course of eleven sittings. They agreed among themselves that at least some of these could not have been produced by trickery and that they themselves could not have been subject to collective

hallucinations, especially when the experiments were made in good light conditions.⁵ Baggally concluded: 'I have no theory to advance as to the nature of the force that was manifested ... but I witnessed enough to convince me ... of some supernormal force which manifests itself in [her] presence ...'⁶

By contrast, Baggally described phenomena produced by the Italian medium Francesco Carancini as 'unsatisfactory' for evidential purposes, being confined to conditions of darkness.⁷ His investigation of the Australian apport medium Charles Bailey led to a more certain conviction of fraudulent practice.⁸

Other Phenomena

Between 1910 and 1911, Baggally investigated a case of apparitions, premonitions, and other occurrences at the house of Charles Tweedale, vicar of Weston⁹ in North Yorkshire. He also examined the work of a successful dowser, concluding that the twig in the dowser's hand moved by auto-suggestion.¹⁰

Survival

Baggally remained unconvinced by spiritualistic phenomena of survival, and is said in later years to have found more certain proof in the mediumistic phenomenon named [cross-correspondences](#).¹¹

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Literature

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Anonymous (1928).
- [2](#). Berger & Joyce (1991), 21.
- [3](#). Baggally (1917); described in Thomas (1905), Ch. 8 *passim*.
- [4](#). Oppenheim (1985), 151; Gauld (1968), 242-44; Hansel (1980), 60-61; Podmore (1910), Ch. 4.
- [5](#). Baggally, Feilding & Carrington (1909), 556-66.
- [6](#). Baggally (1909), 132; Baggally, Feilding & Carrington (1909), 439-40.
- [7](#). Baggally (1909).
- [8](#). Baggally (1912).
- [9](#). Tweeddale (1918), 219, 236-40.
- [10](#). Baggally (1912).
- [11](#). Anonymous (1928), 277; Carrington (1909), 153.