

Alice Johnson

Alice Johnson (1860-1940) was a Cambridge zoologist who played a significant role as researcher and administrator in the early years of the Society for Psychical Research.

Life and Career

Alice Johnson was born in Cambridge and studied natural sciences at Newnham College, Cambridge. When the Balfour Laboratory was inaugurated there in 1884 she was appointed its first Demonstrator in Animal Morphology.

In 1889, she took part in the first series of sittings given to psychical researchers by the medium Leonora Piper in England. The following year she assisted Eleanor Sidgwick, a leading member of the Society for Psychical Research, in carrying out telepathy experiments with the use of hypnosis.^[1]

In 1890, she was appointed private secretary to Eleanor Sidgwick and secretary of the Society for Psychical Research, holding the post from 1903 to 1907 and that of research officer from 1907 to 1916. She edited the society's published proceedings from 1899 to 1916. Working with Henry and Eleanor Sidgwick, Frederic Myers and Frank Podmore she helped produce the report of the Census of Hallucinations in 1894, the largest such survey of anomalous experiences ever made.

Much of Johnson's research was associated with the phenomena of mental mediumship produced by Piper and other mediums, and by practitioners of automatic writing. Her detailed studies of automatic scripts written by the medium Alice Fleming ('Mrs Holland') were published in the society's proceedings.^[2] She also contributed reports of sittings with the physical medium Eusapia Palladino^[3] and the hallucinatory experiences of a 'Mr Grunbaum' in America.^[4]

Johnson was particularly interested in the nature of coincidences,^[5] which she explored with personal case histories. and concluded that if a number of unlikely coincidences seemed to be statistically more numerous than obvious examples of chance, then a case could be made for their having a paranormal origin.^[6]

Johnson was responsible for bringing to publication the book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* by Frederic Myers, the society's leading theorist, who had died in 1901 leaving it unfinished.

Select Publications

Articles

Experiments in thought-transference with Mrs Sidgwick (1893). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 8, 536-96.

Report on the *Census of Hallucinations* (1894, et al). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 10, 25-422.

Eusapia Palladino (1895). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 7, 148-59.

A case of information supernormally acquired (1896-97). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 12, 116-26.

The value of complex coincidences (1897-98, with C.A. Goodhart). *Journal of the Society for Psychical*

Research 8, 183-84; 207-9; 212.

Coincidences (1899). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 14, 158-330.

Note on a possibly automatic incident observed in the case of Mrs Thompson (1902). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 17, 162-63.

The case of Lyon v. Home (1906). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 12, 332.

A series of automatic writings (1907). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 13, 98-102.

The Arensburg poltergeist (1907). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 13, 158-60.

The automatic-writing of Mrs Holland (1908). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 21, 166-391.

Report on some recent sittings for psychic phenomena in America (1908-9). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 21, 94-135.

The education of the sitter (1909). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 21, 483-511.

Some points in the recent reports on automatic scripts (1909). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 14, 345-53.

Supplementary notes on the first report on Mrs Holland's script (1910). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 24, 2-10.

The education of an observer (1910). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 14, 259-60.

The second report on Mrs Holland's scripts (1910). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 24, 201-63.

Sequel to the 'Sesame and Lilies' incident (1910). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 24, 319-28.

Report on a further series of sittings with Eusapia Palladino at Naples (1911). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 25, 67-69.

Comment on sittings with Palladino (1911). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 15, 30-31.

Third report on Mrs Holland's script (1911). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 25, 218-23.

An incident in Mrs Holland's script (1911-12). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 15, 70-75.

Coincidences in pseudo scripts (1911-12). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 15, 291-96.

An experiment in interpretation (1912). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 15, 321-24.

A reconstruction of some 'concordant automatisms' (1914). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 27, 1-156.

Report on some experiments in thought-transference with E. Feilding (1914). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 16, 164-67.

Pseudo physical phenomena in the case of Mr Grunbaum (1914-15). *Proceedings of the Society for*

Psychical Research 27, 400-10.

A further report of Mr Grunbaum's experiences (1915). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 17, 43-52.

Dream analysis (1918). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 30, 33-133.

Obituary: John William Graham (1932). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 27, 324-26.

Mrs Sidgwick's work in psychical research (1936). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 44, 63-94.

Book Reviews

Psychical Experiences of Quaker Ministers by J.W. Graham (1934). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 28, 46-179.

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Literature

Johnson, A. (1898). Coincidences. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 8, 229-31.

Johnson, A. (1899). Coincidences. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 14, 158-330.

Johnson, A. (1910). The second report on Mrs Holland's scripts. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 24, 201-63.

Johnson, A. (1911). Comment on sittings with Palladino. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 15, 30-31.

Johnson, A. (1915). Pseudo physical phenomena in the case of Mr Grunbaum. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 27, 400-10.

Salter, H. (1940-41). Obituary: Alice Johnson. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 46, 16-22.

References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Salter (1940-41), 16.
- 2.^ For instance Johnson (1910), 201-63
- 3.^ Johnson (1911), 30-31.
- 4.^ Johnson (1915), 400-10.
- 5.^ For instance Johnson (1899), 158-330.
- 6.^ Johnson (1898), 231.