

# Montague Keen

Montague Keen (1925-2004), a journalist and later a farmer, investigated crop circles and mediums, and was a leading member of the Society for Psychical Research.

## Life and Career

Montague Keen was born in London on 7 February 1925, and raised as an orthodox Jew. He left school aged 16 after his family's London home was bombed and his father killed during the Blitz, working as a journalist to help support his mother. He became a political correspondent based at the House of Commons, then went into agriculture, farming cattle in Suffolk for over thirty years and acting as a senior official in the National Farmers Union.<sup>1</sup>

He died on 15 January 2004, of a heart attack while speaking in defence of [Rupert Sheldrake](#)'s telepathy research during a public debate at the Royal Society of Arts in London.

## Psychical Research

Keen stated in an interview in the British magazine *Searchlight*

I was intrigued by claims made by friends on behalf of a young Irish clairvoyant, Tom Corbett, later among the most famous mediums in the UK. He gave readings to West End actors, many of whom were willing to tell me their stories, and sign statements, in return for being entertained to lunch in the House of Commons, where I was then working as a political journalist. This convinced me that, among the dross, there were nuggets of veridical predictions, some of which could not be written off as chance. I became, and remain, fascinated by the problem of time, as evidenced by cases of precognition.<sup>2</sup>

He joined the [Society for Psychical Research](#) in 1946, having been influenced by JW Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* and books by [JB Rhine](#) about his experimental investigations of psi phenomena. He was appointed to the organization's governing council in 1992 and also chaired committees.

He was particularly interested in mediumship and survival, but his views were sometimes strongly opposed by sceptical commentators.<sup>3</sup>

Keen held reservations about the emphasis on experimentation in modern parapsychology. He stated in 2004:

I remain convinced that the SPR is a major powerhouse generating research. But I share the view of a great many members who are bored by the concentration on the laboratory experiments showing micro indications of some aspect of psi, when out there, in the field, there are dozens of exciting challenges, from ghosts and poltergeists to mediums and healers, to

supplement the great neglected store of earlier research of which the modern generation of psychology-based experimenters appear largely ignorant.[4](#)

## Investigations

### Crop Circles

During the 1980s Keen investigated crop circles, serving for some years as the scientific adviser to the [Centre for Crop Circle Studies](#). He wrote on the topic in published articles[5](#) and a book,[6](#) arguing that there was scientific evidence for some being paranormal rather than hoaxes.

### Dowsing

Keen published an article in 2009 in *New Scientist*, defending claims regarding the efficacy of [dowsing](#) as a means to discover water sources. He cites research by Hans Dieter Betz, a professor of physics at the Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich, who documented successful activities by a German professional dowser Hans Schröter.[7](#)

### Scole Mediumship Circle

Keen was one of the first psychical researchers to take an interest in a [physical mediumship circle](#) that met regularly in Scole, Suffolk, during the 1990s. He was joined by fellow SPR investigators [Arthur Ellison](#) and [David Fontana](#). The three considered in their 450-page report[8](#) that at least some of the phenomena produced by the circle were genuine, but their investigation was criticized by some SPR colleagues.[9](#)

Keen expanded on his experiences at Scole in other documents.[10](#)

### Ealing Mediumship Circle

Between 1999 and 2000 Keen attended mediumistic sittings at the home of an SPR member in Ealing in west London, aimed at producing physical phenomena. The sittings were held in complete darkness apart from the use of luminous markers and LEDs on a video recorder. The attending 'spirit controls' were asked to move objects, take photographs and make vocal contact from around the room. Keen defended the veracity of the phenomena[11](#) when it was brought into doubt by another attendee.[12](#)

### Jacqueline Poole Case

Jacqueline Poole, a young London woman, was murdered on 11 February 1983. A few days later Christine Holohan contacted the police claiming to have received information about the incident from the spirit of the dead woman. Keen and Guy Playfair investigated these claims and concluded that they presented a genuine example of post-death contact.[13](#) Their findings were disputed by sceptics Tony Youens and Adrian Shaw.[14](#)

## Works

### Books

*1991 Scientific Evidence for the Crop Circle Phenomena* (1992). London: Books for Dillons Only.

### Articles

Behold the frightened man (1995). *Psi Researcher* 18, 21-22.

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A skeptical view of parapsychology (1997). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 61, 289-303.

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Tale of an accursed etching (1997). *Paranormal Review* 4, 9-10.

A pendulous communicator or a psychic stimulus (1998). *Paranormal Review* 5, 7-9.

The pendulous communicator saga: A deepening mystery (1998). *Paranormal Review* 7, 6-9.

Post-mortem pacts (1999). *Paranormal Review* 11, 6-7.

What philosophical theory best fits paranormal phenomena (1999). *Paranormal Review*. 16-20.

*The Scole Report* (1999, with A. Ellison and D. Fontana). *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 58.

Assessing the Scole in an unworthy piece of journalism (2000). *Paranormal Review* 14, 8-9.

Letters (2000). *Paranormal Review* 16, 5-7.

The gifted medium's furore (2001). *Paranormal Review* 18, 5-7.

The case of Edgar Vandy: Defending the evidence (2002). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 66/4, 247-59.

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A possibly unique case of psychic detection (2004, with G.L. Playfair). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 68/1, 1-12.

The Ealing sittings: Could they have been faked? (2004). *Paranormal Review* 29, 21-23.

## Book Reviews

*Round in Circles*, by J. Schnabel (1994). An overview of crop circles: Essay review. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* 59, 370-77.

*Dowsing: An Outline of Present Knowledge*, by S. Scammell (1996). *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* 61, 164-68.

*Twin Telepathy*, by G.L. Playfair (2003). *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* 67, 305-7.

Web Posts

[Airy crop circle theory faces its critics](#) (1990).

[Branches, twigs and rods](#) (1995).

Melvyn Willin

## Literature

Cornell, T. (1999). Some comments on the Scole Report. *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research* 58, 397-403.

Flew, P. (2003). Experiences at Ealing sittings. *Paranormal Review* 28, 3-5.

Fontana, D. (2004). Obituary: Montague Keen. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* 68/4, 280-84.

Holt, N. (2004). Mediumship, survival and psychical research: A tribute to Montague Keen. *Paranormal Review* 32, 17-20.

Keen, M. (1995). [Branches, Twigs and Rods](#). *New Scientist*, 25 December.

Keen, M. (2001). The Scole investigation: A study in critical analysis of paranormal physical phenomena. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 15/2, 167-82.

Playfair, G.L. (2002). SPR members' Jubilee memories. *Paranormal Review* 24, 3.

Stanwick, M. (1998). A skeptic's appraisal of 'A skeptical view of parapsychology' by Montague Keen. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research* 62, 257-62.

Youens, T., & Shaw, A. (1998). [Did A Medium Identify a Murderer?](#)

## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#)  
<https://www.survivalafterdeath.info/researchers/keen.htm>; <https://human...>
- [2.](#)  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20170909014821/http://www.montaguekeen.com/p...>

- [3.](#) Stanwick (1998), 257-62.
- [4.](#) Playfair (2002), 3.
- [5.](#) Keen (1990).
- [6.](#) Keen 1992).
- [7.](#) Keen (1995).
- [8.](#) Keen, Ellison & Fontana (1999).
- [9.](#) E.g., Cornell (1999).
- [10.](#) Keen (2001).
- [11.](#) Keen (2004).
- [12.](#) Flew (2003).
- [13.](#) Keen & Playfair (2004), 1-12.
- [14.](#) Youens (1998).

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