

Reincarnation Cases with Records Made Before Verifications

In the great majority of reincarnation cases, verifications of past-life memory claims were made and a person matching them was identified before investigators reached the scene. This article lists 33 cases in which records were made of a subject's memory claims before they were verified. In these cases, there is no question about what subjects said about the previous life before their memories were confirmed. Some cases have written documentation of the previous person's life and death as well, supplying another level of evidential support.

Introduction

The study of [reincarnation](#) in psychical research or parapsychology involves the investigation of cases of past-life memory arising spontaneously in the waking state or dreams, without the aid of hypnosis or other induction procedures. This research is controversial and, naturally, has attracted sceptical criticism.¹

When [Ian Stevenson](#) began the systematic investigation of past-life memory claims in 1961, he found that by the time he learned about them, most cases had been 'solved' – the subject's memories had been confirmed and the previous incarnation had been identified. Most of the memory claims came from young children who were so insistent about going back to the places they recalled having lived that their parents took them there. Parents followed their children's directions in locating the previous families, many of whom lived in neighbouring villages or towns,² but rarely did they write down what their children were saying before doing this.

In investigating past-life memory claims, Stevenson talked to as many first-hand witnesses as possible, both on the side of the case subject and the side of the previous person, returning to interview them repeatedly, in order to establish as best he could just what the child had said and the steps that led to the family's verifying the memories.³

From the start, Stevenson appreciated the need to reach cases early enough so that he or a colleague could record a child's statements in writing or on tape before assessing the accuracy of the memories, but it proved difficult to do this in the Asian countries in which he concentrated his research. As Stevenson built up a network of assistants, however, this ideal became easier to achieve, and he and his teams were able to study more cases in which they recorded a child's statements before verifying them.⁴

Stevenson's diligence in interviewing and re-interviewing witnesses notwithstanding, cases without records made prior to verifications are open to charges of faulty or selective memory. Once facts about the previous life are known, one cannot be certain that witnesses have not harmonized their memories with what they now know to be true, forgetting unconfirmed remarks or unconsciously

reworking recollections of a child's statements to make them seem more accurate than they were in fact.⁵

Although this possibility must be considered seriously, it may not account for the research findings. Sybo Schouten and Stevenson compared cases with and without prior written records from India and Sri Lanka. On average, 20% to 25% of children's memories about the previous life in solved cases were wrong in one way or another and this was true whether or not the statements were recorded in writing before they were checked. The study found that 76.7% of statements in cases with prior written records and 78.4% of statements in cases without prior written records were correct for the previous person, even though many more statements were recorded per subject in written-records cases.⁶

Cases with prior written records comprise only a small fraction of all reincarnation cases that have been investigated. Of roughly 2,500 cases in the files of the [Division of Perceptual Studies](#) (DOPS) at the University of Virginia in 2005, only 33 (1.3%) had records made before verifications.⁷ Only 21 of these have published reports, making them eligible for this review. Several additional cases with records made before verifications have been reported since 2005 or by authors not affiliated with the University of Virginia, bringing the total number of published cases with prior written records to 33.

What are 'Records Made before Verifications'?

What exactly are 'records made before verifications' or 'prior written records'? Although Stevenson and others⁸ have used the term 'records made before verifications', Schouten and Stevenson wrote about 'Type B' or 'before' cases, which they defined in two ways – as cases with statements made 'before verification' and as cases with statements made 'before the [present and past] families met'.⁹ Elsewhere, Stevenson similarly used both definitions, interchangeably.¹⁰

Because in many cases without prior written records, a subject's statements are verified when the present and past families meet, the inconsistency may only be apparent. However, there are other variations in the description of cases classified under this heading. In discussing the [James Leininger](#) reincarnation case, [Jim B Tucker](#) distinguishes between memory claims documented before and after the previous person is identified, another way of stating the problem.¹¹ Similarly, [Erlendur Haraldsson](#) characterized cases with 'prerecorded statements' as ones made 'before the case was "solved"'.¹² and [James Matlock](#) defined a 'written records case' as one in which records were made 'before the previous person was identified'.¹³

[Michael Sudduth](#) drew a distinction between cases in which a subject's statements were recorded before the previous person was identified and cases in which statements were recorded before verification attempts began.¹⁴ Matlock has noted another variation, cases that qualify as 'before' cases by virtue of dated records of memory claims, but in which no record was made of a subject's statements before the previous person was identified.¹⁵ Examples are the Wilhelm Emmerich and Wilhelm Schmidt past-life memories of Will (see below), in which the memories were recorded in dated web forum posts. Another example is James Leininger.

Although some of James's statements were mentioned in a television programme recorded before the previous person was known, others are inferred from date-stamped internet search downloads.[16](#)

These latter cases show that it is not the 'written' aspect that counts as much as the 'before' aspect in documenting testimony. The French case of EC presents an additional variation, in which memory claims were recorded after the identification of the previous person but before the verification of the specific claims.[17](#) This harks back to the standard employed by Schouten and Stevenson,[18](#) statements recorded before verifications, without specifying when exactly in the case investigation the statements were recorded.

[Stephen Braude](#) introduced the term 'early-bird case' for cases 'in which investigators record subjects' statements *before* anyone attempts to find a corresponding previous personality, or at least before the case is "solved".[19](#) Records need not be made by investigators, however; in the great majority of cases, they were made by family members, journalists, or other persons, even in a few cases the subjects themselves. Nonetheless, Braude's term is a convenient shorthand for 'cases with records made before verifications', and is sometimes used as a synonym for what Schouten and Stevenson[20](#) called 'before' cases.

The defining characteristic of 'before' cases is that a case subject's memory claims are documented before they have been determined to be correct, incorrect, or unverifiable, because after this point there is the danger that a subject's statements (or witnesses to a subject's statements) have been influenced by ordinary sources of information. Whether emphasis is placed on records made before investigations begin, before the previous person is identified, before the present and past families have met, or simply before verifications are made depends on how a given case unfolds.[21](#) Matlock has called for timelines of developments in reporting reincarnation cases; timelines in 'before' cases would reveal how these factors play out in individual cases.[22](#)

Features of 'Before' Cases

Whilst the emphasis in 'before' cases is on a subject's statements, it is important to realize that reincarnation cases involve more than memory claims. Case subjects often recognize places and people from the previous lives and when the previous persons are identified, [similarities in personality and behaviour](#) between the lives may become apparent. Additionally, there may be [physical correspondences](#) such as likenesses in facial structure, eye form or skin colour; birthmarks or birth defects matching scars or wounds; and recurring diseases.[23](#)

Records that document elements on the previous person's side exist alongside records documenting the subject's memory claims in several cases. Stevenson sought out police, medical and autopsy reports to confirm the previous person's injuries and manner of death and collected other documents in support of other aspects of the memories. In eighteen of the 33 published 'before', there are records pertaining to the previous person's life and/or death. Documents of this sort reduce reliance on witness memory and when combined with records of a subject's memories before verification, add substantially to the evidential strength of a case.

In the following listings, 'before' cases with past-life documentation are separated from cases without past-life documentation. Nahm has a different way of ranking 'before' cases, which are not equal in the number of statements recorded before verifications or other features. Nahm identified fifteen of the 31 'before' cases available at the time of his writing as especially compelling.²⁴ Nahm's fifteen 'important' 'before' cases are indicated with asterisks in the headings of the case summaries below. The nine cases with past-life documentation on Nahm's list arguably deserve the greatest attention.

The subject and his or her family were strangers to the previous person and past-life families in all of the 33 cases included here.²⁵ In all but two cases, the main memories surfaced in early childhood. With rare exceptions, not only had the subject's memory claims not been investigated before being recorded, the identity, or probable identity, of the previous person was unknown to the subject's family. With the exception of [Jenny Cockell](#)'s self-reported memories of Charles Savage, all cases had follow-up investigations by researchers.²⁶ Ten of the 33 'before' cases come from Western countries, with the remainder from Asian countries. Although Stevenson depended on interpreters with Asian cases, the initial records were made by family members, journalists or other persons native to the cultures and languages in question in all but two cases (those of Imad Elawar and Kemal Atasoy).

'Before' Cases Without Past-Life Documentation

Dilukshi Nissanka (Sri Lanka)*

Dilukshi Nissanka's claim to remember having died by drowning when she fell into a stream was documented initially in a letter to the abbot of a rock temple, who tried to verify the memories. When he encountered difficulties, he contacted a journalist friend who interviewed Dilukshi and her family, then wrote an article about her for his newspaper, *Weekend*.

This article came to the attention of a man who recognized Dilukshi's memories as referring to his deceased daughter. He wrote to Dilukshi's father, sending a photocopy to the abbot. As it turned out, only one of the fourteen statements initially recorded by Dilukshi's father was wrong, although two others were unverifiable. Of 22 statements recorded in the *Weekend* account, thirteen were correct, five were wrong, and four could not be evaluated one way or the other.

The case was followed up by Erlendur Haraldsson, who reported his investigations first in [a journal paper](#) and later a book.²⁷ He wrote [an article](#) about it for the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Duminda Ratnayake (Sri Lanka)

Eight of Duminda Ratnayake's memories of being a Buddhist monk at the Asgiriya monastery in Kandy were recorded by a Sri Lankan journalist, who then quickly identified them as referring to a certain monk. Some of Duminda's statements were not appropriate to this man, however, and further investigation by Haraldsson

identified another monk, the chief monk of the monastery in the 1920s, for whom all eight statements were correct.

Haraldsson published his report in [a journal paper](#) and later in a book.²⁸ He also wrote [an article](#) about the case for the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Gnanatilleka Baddewithana (Sri Lanka)*

This was the first Sri Lankan reincarnation case to be investigated, under the direction of Buddhist scholar HSS Nissanka, in 1960 and 1961.²⁹ The first accounts of it appeared in the Sri Lankan press in 1960 and 1961.³⁰ Nissanka recorded, in writing or on tape, over sixty of Gnanatilleka's memory claims, before he verified them. Other statements were reported to Nissanka by other persons who had known the person whose life Gnanatilleka recalled, a Sri Lankan boy who had died about fifteen months before his birth. Nissanka was able to obtain the boy's death certificate, which helped to clarify certain things about the way he died. Nissanka reported on his investigation in Sinhalese in 1964 and later in an English-language book, *The Girl Who Was Reborn*.³¹

Stevenson came to the case after Nissanka, but investigated it independently; he included his report in his 1966 monograph, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*.³² The case is described [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Imad Elawar (Lebanon)

Stevenson was the first to record the past-life memories of Imad Elawar and to identify the person to whom they referred, a young man from another Lebanese Druze village. Stevenson's report appeared in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* in 1966. Of 56 statements Stevenson recorded for Imad, only three proved incorrect for the young man; another three could not be assessed. The identification of the young man as the referent of Imad's memories was questioned by sceptic [Leonard Angel](#), whose arguments Julio Barros analyzed and dismissed for being misleading.³³ The case is described and the controversy treated at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Indika Guneratne (Sri Lanka)

This is another case Stevenson was fortunate to learn about before the present and previous families met. A tentative identification had been made by Indika's father, although he had done nothing to verify the boy's memory claims as the man (unknown to him personally) lived in a different part of Sri Lanka. Indika's family was interviewed and his statements recorded by Stevenson's field assistants before undertaking verifications that confirmed Indika's father's conjecture. Stevenson's report appears in the second volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series.³⁴

Iranga Jayakody (Sri Lanka)*

Stevenson's Sri Lankan team learned about this case, interviewed the family and made lists of Iranga's statements before tracing the person to whom they referred.

Eighteen statements initially recorded led to the identification of their referent and this was confirmed with an additional 25 statements recorded before the two families met for the first time. Of the 43 statements recorded, only two were incorrect; another three were unverified but doubtful. Stevenson and his colleague Godwin Samararatne reported on their investigation [here](#).³⁵

Jagdish Chandra (India)

Jagdish Chandra was the son of Indian lawyer KKN Sahay, who published a list of his statements before verifying them. Sahay wrote about the case in a booklet published in 1927. It was later gone over by Stevenson, who spoke to Jagdish in adulthood and added new details.³⁶ This important case and the criticisms it has engendered are treated [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Kemal Atasoy (Turkey)*

Kemal Atasoy was a Turkish Alevi boy who retained his memories at age six, when he was interviewed by [Jürgen Keil](#). With the help of an interpreter, Keil recorded 23 specific memories, all except seven of which he was subsequently able to relate to an Armenian man who had died fifty years before Kemal's birth. [Jim B Tucker](#) summarized this case in a book, but the principal report is in [a journal paper](#) he authored with Keil.³⁷ The case is treated at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Kumkum Verma (India)*

An aunt took an interest in Kumkum Verma's memories and recorded them in a notebook before any attempt to verify them was made. The aunt's notebook unfortunately was lost, but not before fifteen of Kumkum's statements had been copied out for Stevenson's team. All of these statements turned out to be true or partially true for a Muslim blacksmith from a distant town. Stevenson's report of his team's investigation appears in the first volume of his series, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*.³⁸ The case is described more fully [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Prabhu (India)

The case of Prabhu was one of the first reincarnation cases to be investigated by modern standards and is the earliest 'before' cases of which there is a published account. The case was investigated in the 1920s under the direction of RBS Sunderlal, a local government functionary, who reported it in a French journal article.³⁹ KS Rawat and [Titus Rivas](#) provide an English-language summary of the case that draws on a 1964–65 follow-up investigation by HN Banerjee, PK Mathur and SC Mukherjee, in addition to Sahay's original report.⁴⁰

Shanti Devi (India)

This 1930s case is important because a teacher recorded Shanti Devi's memories in a letter and sent them to the town she claimed to have lived, addressed according to information she gave, and received a reply certifying them as correct. A government

committee was formed to accompany Shanti Devi on her first visit to the town and witnessed her recognitions of people and places there.[41](#) The case was studied extensively by Swedish journalist Sture Lönnerstrand in the 1950s.[42](#) It is treated at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Sunder Lal (India)

The case of Sunder Lal is one of seven KKN Sahay included in his booklet and one of three of which a written record was made before the past-life memories were verified.[43](#)

Sunita Chandak (India)*

Sunita Chandak's father enlisted the help of a journalist in assessing her memory claims. The journalist published an article about the case, listing several of Sunita's statements. A reader of the story recognized these as corresponding to his deceased daughter. When she was taken to his village, Sunita recognized places and people connected to the previous life.

Although Stevenson investigated this case, he never published a report of it. It is known from the account of Tom Shroder, a *Washington Post* journalist who accompanied Stevenson on a research tour to India in 1997.[44](#) The case is described [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopaedia*.

Swarnlata Mishra (India)*

A few of Swarnlata Mishra's extensive past-life recollections were recorded in writing by her father, who gave them to HN Banerjee. Banerjee went to the town in which Swarnlata said she had lived and, solely on the basis of these notes, was able to identify the family to whom Swarnlata was referring. When taken to the town, Swarnlata recognized places and people, despite attempts to mislead her.

Stevenson re-investigated this case and wrote about it in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*.[45](#) It is described at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Thusitha Silva (Sri Lanka)

Tissa Jayawardane of Stevenson's Sri Lanka team made a written record of some of Thusitha Silva's memories of a girl who had drowned in a river, then went to the town she recalled having lived and on the basis of her statements tracked down the family to whom they referred. All but three of thirteen verifiable statements fit a daughter the family had lost to drowning. A second member of the team, Godwin Samararatne, recorded seventeen additional statements, fifteen of which turned out to be correct and two unverifiable. Stevenson and his team interviewed members of both families, but at the time of Stevenson and Samararatne's report of this case, available [here](#), Thusitha and her family had had no contact with the previous family.[46](#)

'Before' Cases with Past-Life Documentation

Ajendra Singh Chauhan (India)*

One of Stevenson's Indian scouts and field assistants, GRS Gaur, learned about this case from a relative of Ajendra Singh Chauhan's family. Gaur recorded Ajendra's memories about the previous life and death in a shoot-out with dacoits (bandits). Gaur travelled to the town Ajendra recalled having lived and determined that 25 of 27 statements he had recorded were correct for a man who had been killed in the manner Ajendra recalled. Gaur obtained records of an enquiry into the incident from the local police station. [Antonia Mills](#) followed up the case with Gaur's assistance and wrote about it in a book chapter and [a journal paper](#) available online.⁴⁷

Bishen Chand Kapoor (India)*

This is another case originally studied by KKN Sahay in the 1920s. On meeting Bishen Chand, Sahay noted twenty things he had been saying about the previous life, and with these notes traced the person to whom the boy's memories referred. Everything that he had recorded turned to be correct for a certain deceased young man. Sahay accompanied Bishen Chand on his first visit to the town of the previous life, where he recognized places and picked out the man's father's image in an old photograph. Details of Bishen Chand's memories were confirmed by the diary of a lawyer who had represented the man in a criminal affair.

This case was restudied in the 1960s and 1970s by Stevenson, who reported on it in the first volume of his Cases of the Reincarnation Type series.⁴⁸ It is described at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Chatura Buddika Karunaratne (Sri Lanka)

Two Sri Lankan journalists heard about Chatura Karunaratne's past-life memories and independently interviewed him and his family concerning them. A published story about the case came to the attention of Tissa Jayawardane, then assisting Erlendur Haraldsson. Jayawardane met with Chatura and recorded additional items before the previous person was identified.

The case was solved when a man saw the newspaper account and recognized it as referring to his deceased son. Haraldsson subsequently obtained a document from a military court of enquiry regarding the circumstances of the death in question. A photograph of the previous person's body taken at his funeral shows his face bare, but his head and neck covered with bandages extending over his left ear, the location of one of Chatura's birthmarks. Haraldsson reported his investigation in [a journal paper](#) and later in a book.⁴⁹

Christina K (Netherlands)

[Titus Rivas](#) investigated the Dutch case of Christina K over several years and wrote about it more than once. When he first reported it, he had identified a likely previous person from records in a municipal archive but had been unable to trace family members from the previous life. Later he did so, and this allowed him to confirm more of Christina's memories. Unfortunately, by this time Christina herself

had died; she never had the opportunity to meet members of the previous family.[50](#) For more about this case, see Rivas's summary [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

EC (France)

In this French case studied by Matlock but not yet published, there were strong behavioural influences from two past lives which were not clearly recalled until the subject was in her 50s. The memories then surfaced in a variety of ways, in dreams and hypnagogic states, guided meditation and past-life regression, as well as in the ordinary waking state and in nonvisual intuitive impressions. The memories of one of the lives were specific and detailed to be associated with an American Marine who died during the Vietnam War. Confirmations came through both print and online records, some contemporary with the battle in which the man was killed.[51](#)

James Leininger (USA)*

This American case has occasioned a good deal of controversy, but it is well documented. James Leininger's parents wrote about his memories and how they came to confirm their accuracy in *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot*.[52](#) Although James's parents did not keep a list of the things James said about the life and death he recalled, they preserved date-stamped search results from attempts to confirm them. They also retained his childhood drawings, and the family was taped talking about the case for a television documentary made before the case was solved. Dated documents supporting the identification are available through the Psi Open Data repository.[53](#)

[Jim B Tucker](#) followed up this case and wrote about in [a journal paper](#) and in book chapters.[54](#) In addition, [James Matlock](#) has provided a detailed accounting of its timeline.[55](#) This case and the criticisms it has received are covered at greater length [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Jenny Cockell (Charles Savage) (UK)

[Jenny Cockell](#) had waking memories and dreams in childhood that she was able to connect to Charles Savage, but she did not initially know who he was. As an adult, a partial name came to her in regression under hypnosis, and this enabled her to track down his death certificate. The fatal accident noted there differed from what she had envisioned under hypnosis, but was consistent with a childhood dream. Cockell wrote about her memories of Charles Savage initially in *Journeys Through Time* and later met a member of Charles's family, from whom she confirmed the accuracy of items of which she was previously uncertain.[56](#) This case is summarized [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Jenny Cockell (Mary Sutton) (UK)

Jenny Cockell's well-known memories of Mary Sutton have more documentary support than generally is realized. She gave a detailed account of her memories to a BBC reporter before they had been verified; the reporter's nine-page list of statements and their corroboration by Mary's eldest son is reproduced in one of Cockell's books.[57](#) A map of the town she drew in childhood turned out to conform

to an actual map of the town, which she had not previously seen.⁵⁸ Cockell obtained Mary's birth and death certificates, establishing her age at death and confirming other details of her memories.⁵⁹

Cockell's self-investigation was reviewed by [Mary Rose Barrington](#), who deposited her records in the archives of the [Society for Psychical Research](#). For more on this case and criticisms it has received, see the article about it [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Ruprecht Schulz (Germany)

Ruprecht Schulz was in his fifties when images of killing himself in an earlier life came to his mind. By following up hunches and clues in his memories, he identified the person he believed he had been. He then wrote a book about his experiences, which brought them to the attention of Stevenson and other researchers.

Stevenson obtained an account of Schulz's memories written before he made contact with the previous person's son, who certified Schulz's memories as correct for his father. Stevenson also obtained this man's death certificate and Schulz's birth certificate. He described the case in *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*.⁶⁰ For further details, see the summary [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Ryan Hammons (USA)*

Ryan Hammons' mother Cyndi recorded his many past-life memories in a journal, which by the time the case was solved included well over two hundred items. Ryan recalled being associated with Hollywood, but the case was solved only with difficulty. He recognized a photograph in a book as being of himself, but this man was identified only after research in the archives of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Among other things, Ryan said he had died at 61, which was initially contradicted by the previous person's death certificate, but subsequent research determined that the wrong date of birth was given there and that Ryan was correct on this point. Jim Tucker investigated this case and wrote about it in *Life After Life*.⁶¹ It is described [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopaedia*.

Rylann O'Bannion (USA)*

Rylann O'Bannion appeared in an episode of the American television programme *Ghost Inside My Child* in 2014, when she was six. By that time, her case had been solved, but it had not been when her mother began corresponding with producers of the show, resulting in an unusually long and detailed documentary history of Rylann's memories leading up to the identification.

James Matlock interviewed Rylann and Cindy four years after the show aired and covers more recent developments in *Signs of Reincarnation*. Matlock obtained the previous person's autopsy report, which supported Rylann's recollections of her death. Matlock has described the case in an article for *Paranormal Review*, as well as in his book.⁶² It is described [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Subashini Gunasekera (Sri Lanka)*

The case of Subashini Gunasekera is another that Stevenson's Sri Lanka team learned about and documented before solving. They recorded 32 of Subashini's statements about being caught in a landslide at a tea plantation on the island; all but seven turned out to fit a child who had died in this way. When Stevenson joined the investigation, he examined contemporary news reports of the event; these provided further support for the accuracy of Subashini's memories. Stevenson and Godwin Samararatne reported on their investigation in [a journal paper](#).

Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne (Sri Lanka)*

Sujith supplied many details about what he felt was an earlier life, which ended when he stepped into the path of an oncoming lorry. His memory claims came to the attention of a monk in a nearby monastery, who took down sixteen of them, went to the town Sujith cited and confirmed their correctness for the person with whom he identified. Stevenson was later able to verify details of the accident through police records. He reported on his investigation in the second volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series.⁶³

Despite its many strong features, this case has garnered sceptical criticisms. These are discussed in an article [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Sunita Khandelwal (India)

A lawyer friend of Sunita Khandelwal's family wrote down several of her memory claims and sent the list to HN Banerjee, who interviewed Sunita and her family and recorded several more items before verifying them.⁶⁴ Stevenson later went over the case and secured medical records that documented the death Sunita recalled, confirming that a birthmark she bore was at the site of a fatal wound. Stevenson reported his investigation in *Reincarnation and Biology*.⁶⁵ This case is described more fully [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Takeharu (Japan)

When Takeharu was two years old, he played with toy ships in the bath in a peculiar way, sinking them as if they had been torpedoed. When he was three, he started talking about *Yamato*, which at first meant nothing to his parents. Gradually they realized he was referring to a battleship *Yamato* which had been torpedoed and sunk by American forces during World War II, 67 years before the boy's birth.

Takeharu said various things about a past life he seemed to be remembering. His mother wrote these things down and contacted [Ohkado Masayuki](#), who discovered that Takeharu's memories matched a young officer assigned to the ship.⁶⁶ For a fuller summary of this case and its investigation, see [here](#).

Thusita Silva (Sri Lanka)*

Thusita Silva's past-life memories of having drowned after falling from a suspension footbridge were documented by members of Erlendur Haraldsson's Sri Lankan team before verifications. The team recorded 28 statements, of which

seventeen were determined to be correct, seven wrong, and four unverifiable. In addition, Haraldsson secured a document from the local coroner's office that confirmed the circumstances of the death Thusita recalled. Haraldsson reported his investigation first in [a journal paper](#) and later in a book.⁶⁷ He also described the case [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Will (Wilhelm Emmerich) (USA)

'Will' is the pseudonym of an American man who claims to recall fragments of thirty past lives, most of the memories coming to him in adulthood. He wrote about his memories in web forums, which came to the attention of researcher KM Wehrstein. Wilhelm Emmerich, a Nazi concentration camp guard, was the most recent life that could be verified, through research on Ancestry.com and other sites.⁶⁸ For more about this case, see [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Will (Wilhelm Schmidt) (USA)

Wilhelm Schmidt, who fought and died during World War I, was the person Will believes he was immediately preceding Wilhelm Emmerich. Memories of Wilhelm Schmidt, like those of Wilhelm Emmerich, emerged principally in adulthood, although there were childhood precursors. Also as with Wilhelm Emmerich, Will's memories of Wilhelm Schmidt were documented in date- and time-stamped entries in online forums and verified by research on internet sites.⁶⁹ For more about this case, see [elsewhere](#) in the *Psi Encyclopedia*.

Critical Responses to 'Before' Cases

Because they document a case subject's recollections before their referent is identified, and sometimes include records of the past life and death as well, 'before' cases effectively dispense with one of the most common concerns with reincarnation case studies, questions about the reliability of witness testimony.

In addressing [Michael Nahm's](#)⁷⁰ assessment that strong 'before' cases provide some of the best evidence for reincarnation, [Keith Augustine](#) allows that they 'would be impressive', but 'only if normal/conventional sources of information for ostensibly anomalous knowledge were not present' in these cases. However, he avers, without substantiation, 'we already know' that ordinary sources of information account for the apparent memories.⁷¹ In a footnote, Augustine does not directly support this allegation, but refers to what he regards as a related issue, the 'law of good enough' evoked by Sudduth in his attack on the James Leininger case;⁷² but this has since been undermined by Matlock.⁷³

Sceptics have targeted several 'before' cases for special criticism. These are covered elsewhere in the *Psi Encyclopedia*, so it is enough to indicate them here: [Gnanatilleka Baddewithana](#), [Imad Elawar](#), [Jagdish Chandra](#), [Kemal Atasoy](#), [Bishen Chand Kapoor](#), [Jenny Cockell's memories of Mary Sutton](#) and [Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne](#), in addition to [James Leininger](#). Interested readers are directed to these pieces to see the substance, or lack thereof, of the criticisms. Sceptics frequently throw out charges (including investigator fraud) without substantiating them – in striking contrast to the works they are critiquing. It is hard to see how anything in

the sceptical appraisal of 'before' cases undermines Nahm's assessment⁷⁴ that the stronger of them provide some of the best evidence for reincarnation.⁷⁵

James G Matlock

Literature

Allix, S. (2021). *When I Was Someone Else: The Incredible True Story of Past Life Connection*. Rochester, Vermont, USA: Park Street Press. [Translation of *Lorsque j'étais quelqu'un d'autre*. Paris: Mama Éditions, 2017.]

Angel, L. (1994). [Empirical evidence of reincarnation? Examining Stevenson's 'most impressive' case](#). *Skeptical Inquirer* 18/5 (September/October), 481-87.

Angel, L. (2015). Is there adequate empirical evidence for reincarnation? In *The Myth of an Afterlife: The Case against Life after Death*, ed. by M. Martin & K. Augustine, 645-54. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Augustine, K. (2022). [How not to do survival research: Reflections on the Bigelow Institute essay competition](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36/2, 366-98.

Banerjee, H.N., Mathur, P.K., & Mukherjee, S.C. (1965). *Review of a Case-History Suggestive of Extra-Cerebral Memory: Prabhu—Report of the Case Suggestive of Extra Cerebral Memory*. (Research Monograph No. 3.) Jaipur, India: University of Rajasthan Department of Parapsychology.

Barrington, M.R. (2002). The case of Jenny Cockell: Towards a verification of an unusual 'past life' report. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 66, 106-12.

Barros, J.C.S. (2004). [Another look at the Imad Elawar case: A review of Leonard Angel's critique of this "past life memory case study."](#) [Web post.]

Braude, S.E. (2003). *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life after Death*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Cockell, J. (1993). *Yesterday's Children: The Extraordinary Search for My Past Life Family*. London: Piatkus. [Reprinted 1994 as *Across Time and Death: A Mother's Search for her Past Life Children*. New York: Simon & Schuster.]

Cockell, J. (2008). *Journeys Through Time: Uncovering My Past Lives*. London: Piatkus.

Cockell, J. [2017]. *Past Lives Eternal*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Cockell, J. (2021). *Living With Past Lives*. [Independently published.]

Grubbs, A. (2006). *Chosen to Believe*. Jonesboro, Georgia, USA: Pink Elephant Press.

Gupta, L.D., Sharma, N.R., & Mathur, T.C. (1936). *An Inquiry into the Case of Shanti Devi*. New Delhi: International Aryan League.

- Hall, M.P. (1946). *Reincarnation: The Cycle of Necessity* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society.
- Haraldsson, E. (1991). [Children claiming past life memories: Four cases in Sri Lanka](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 5, 233-62.
- Haraldsson, E. (2000). [Birthmarks and claims of previous-life memories: II. The case of Chatura Karunaratne](#). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 64, 82-92.
- Haraldsson, E., & Abu-Izzeddin, M. (2002). [Development of certainty about the correct deceased person in a case of the reincarnation type in Lebanon: The case of Nazih Al-Danaf](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 16, 363-80.
- Haraldsson, E., & Matlock, J.G. (2016). *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiences of Reincarnation*. Hove, UK: White Crow Books.
- Haraldsson, E., & Samararatne, G. (1999). [Children who speak of a previous life as a Buddhist monk: Three new cases](#). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 63, 268-91.
- Keil, H.H.J., & Tucker, J.B. (2005). [Children who claim to remember previous lives: Cases with written records made before the previous personality was identified](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 19, 91-101.
- Leininger, B., & Leininger, A., with Gross, J. (2009). *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- Lönnerstrand, S. (1998). [I Have Lived Before: The True Story of the Reincarnation of Shanti Devi](#). Huntsville, AR: Ozark Mountain Publishers.
- Matlock, J.G. (2019). *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Matlock, J.G. (2020). The reincarnation of Jennifer Schultz? *Paranormal Review* No. 93, 12-15.
- Matlock, J.G. (2022a). [Clarifying muddled waters, part 1: A secure timeline for the James Leininger case](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36/1, 100-20.
- Matlock, J.G. (2022b). [Clarifying muddled waters, part 2: What the Sudduth-Tucker debate about James Leininger suggests for reincarnation research](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36/4, 760-81.
- Matlock, J.G. (2024a). [A series of past-life visions and intuitive impressions surfacing in middle adulthood with behavioral influences beginning in childhood](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 38/2, 212-232.
- Matlock, J.D. (2024b). [Past-life memory sources of dreams: Angela Grubbs' recollections of Francine Donovan, recorded before verification](#). *Journal of Anomalous Experiences and Cognition* 4/2, 248-275.

- Mills, A. (2004). [Inferences from the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan: The effect of parental questioning, of meeting the “previous life” family, an aborted attempt to quantify probabilities, and the impact on his life as a young adult](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 18, 609-41.
- Mills, A., Haraldsson, E., & Keil, H.H.J. (1994). [Replication studies of cases suggestive of reincarnation by three independent investigators](#). *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 88, 207-19.
- Mills, A., & Lynn, J. (2000). Past-life experience. In *Varieties of Anomalous Experience*, ed. by E. Cardena, S.J. Lynn, & S. Krippner, 283-313. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Mills, A., & Tucker, J.B. (2013). Past-life experiences. In *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence* (2nd ed.), ed. by E. Cardena, S.J. Lynn, & S. Krippner, 303-32. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Nahm, M. (2021). [Climbing mount evidence: A strategic assessment of the best available evidence for the survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death](#). Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies.
- Nahm, M. (2022). [A guardian angel gone astray: How not to engage in scientific debates](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36/4, 783-93.
- Nissanka, H.S.S. (2001). *The Girl Who Was Reborn: A Case-Study Suggestive of Reincarnation*. Colombo, Sri Lanka: S. Godage Brothers.
- Ohkado, M. (2022). [A Japanese case of the reincarnation type with written records made before verifications: A child claiming to have fought on the battleship Yamato](#). *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* (in press).
- Pasricha, S.K., & Barker, D.R. (1981). A case of the reincarnation type in India: The case of Rakesh Gaur. *European Journal of Parapsychology* 3, 381-408.
- Ransom, C. (2015). A critique of Ian Stevenson’s rebirth research. In *The Myth of an Afterlife: The Case against Life after Death*, ed. by M. Martin & K. Augustine, 639-44. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Rawat, K.S., & Rivas, T. (2021). *Reincarnation as a Scientific Concept: Scholarly Evidence for Past Lives*. Hove, UK: White Crow Books.
- Rivas, T. (2004). [Six cases of the reincarnation type in the Netherlands](#). *Paranormal Review* No. 29, 17-20.
- Rivas, T. (2020). [Dutch children with past-life memories](#). *Psi Encyclopedia*. [Web post.]
- Sahay, K.K.N. [1927]. *Reincarnation: Verified Cases of Rebirth after Death*. Bareilly, India: Gupta.
- Schouten, S., & Stevenson, I. (1998). [Does the socio-psychological hypothesis explain cases of the reincarnation type?](#) *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 186,

504-6.

Shroder, T. (1999). *Old Souls: The Scientific Evidence for Past Lives*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Stevenson, I. (1974). *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (2nd ed., rev.). Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia. [First ed. 1966, *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, Vol. 26.]

Stevenson, I. (1975). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume I: Ten Cases in India*. Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1977). *Cases of the Reincarnation type. Volume II: Ten Cases in Sri Lanka*. Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1997). [*Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*](#) (2 vols). Westport, Connecticut, USA: Praeger.

Stevenson, I. (2001). *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation* (rev. ed.). Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland.

Stevenson, I. (2003). *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland.

Stevenson, I., & Keil, J. (2000). [The stability of assessments of paranormal connections in reincarnation-type cases](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 14, 365-82.

Stevenson, I., & Samararatne, G. (1988). [Three new cases of the reincarnation type in Sri Lanka with written records made before verifications](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 2, 217-38.

Sudduth, M. (2022). [Response to Jim Tucker](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36/1, 91-99.

Sunderlal, R.B.S. (1924). Cas apparents de réminiscences de vies antérieures. *Revue Métapsychique* 4, 302-37.

Tucker, J B. (2013). *Return to Life: Extraordinary Cases of Children who Remember Past Lives*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Tucker, J.B. (2016). [The case of James Leininger: An American case of the reincarnation type](#). *Explore: The Journal of Science and Healing* 12/3, 200-7.

Wehrstein, K.M. (2019). An adult reincarnation case with multiple solved past lives: Recalling Wilhelm Emmerich. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 83/1, 1-17,

Wehrstein, K.M. (2021). When a name does not identify: Will in search of Wilhelm Schmidt. Wehrstein, K. M. (2021). *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 85/4, 193-212.

Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1.](#) For reviews of the criticisms of reincarnation case studies see [here](#) and [here](#).
- [2.](#) The median distance between the past and present places or residence in cases investigated by Stevenson is only 25 km or 15.5 miles (Stevenson, 2001, 242).
- [3.](#) See Stevenson (1974, 1975, 2001) on his research methodology, which has become the standard for the field: Matlock (2019, 2022b). For an examination of how cases are solved by the families involved, see Haraldsson & Abu-Izzeddin (2002).
- [4.](#) Stevenson & Samararatne (1988).
- [5.](#) This argument was made most famously by David Barker in Pasricha & Barker (1981).
- [6.](#) Schouten & Stevenson (1998).
- [7.](#) Keil & Tucker (2005, 97).
- [8.](#) Stevenson & Samararatne (1988); Keil & Tucker (2005).
- [9.](#) Schouten & Stevenson (1998), 504, 505. Nahm (2021, 2022) adopted this terminology.
- [10.](#) Stevenson (2001), 155, 177, 162, 289-90.
- [11.](#) Tucker (2016, 2022).
- [12.](#) Haraldsson (2000), 82.
- [13.](#) Matlock (2019), 306.
- [14.](#) Sudduth (2022), 94.
- [15.](#) Matlock (2022b).
- [16.](#) Tucker (2016); Matlock (2022a, 2022b).
- [17.](#) Matlock (2023).
- [18.](#) Schouten & Stevenson (1998).
- [19.](#) Braude (2003), 182, *his italics*.
- [20.](#) Schouten & Stevenson (1988).
- [21.](#) For Nahm (2022), these constitute 'subtypes' of the 'before' type. All are applicable to some 'before' cases, but none to all 'before' cases.
- [22.](#) Matlock (2022b).
- [23.](#) Matlock (2019). The presence of physical carryovers in reincarnation may be surprising, but Matlock points to indications that they are psychogenic, produced by the reincarnating mind through psychokinesis.
- [24.](#) Nahm (2021), 24-29.
- [25.](#) Even when statements are recorded in 'before' cases with family and acquaintance relationships, the possibility that the subject overheard something that someone said cannot be ruled out conclusively. Written records in the Brazilian cases of [Kilden Alexandre Waterloo](#) and [Rodrigo Marques](#) are excluded for this reason.
- [26.](#) Apparently reliable cases excluded because they have not yet been scrutinized by the research community include Grubbs (2006) and Allix (2021). All the listed cases include documents seen by investigators. Generally, copies remain in their possession. the self-reported German case of Georg Neidhart (Stevenson, 2003), which he lists a 'before' case elsewhere

(1974, 271 n1). but because it is not clear that Neidhart's pre-verification notes have survived, that case is not included here.

- [27](#). Haraldsson ([1991](#)); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 73-80.
- [28](#). Haraldsson & Samararatne (1999); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 28-33.
- [29](#). HSS Nissanka is not related to Dilukshi Nissanka, the subject of a Sri-Lankan 'before' case.
- [30](#). Nissanka (2001), 11.
- [31](#). Nissanka (2001).
- [32](#). Stevenson (1974), 131-49.
- [33](#). Angel (1994, 2015); Barros (2004).
- [34](#). Stevenson (1977).
- [35](#). Stevenson & Samararatne ([1988](#)), 225-29.
- [36](#). Sahay (1927), 1-8; Stevenson (1975).
- [37](#). Tucker (2005), xi-xiv; Keil & Tucker ([2005](#)).
- [38](#). Stevenson (1975).
- [39](#). Sunderlal (1924).
- [40](#). Rawat & Rivas (2021), 35-39; Banerjee, Mathur, & Mukherjee (1965).
- [41](#). Gupta, Sharma, & Mathur (1936); Lönnerstrand (1998).
- [42](#). Hall (1946), 147-54; Lönnerstrand (1998); Rawat & Rivas (2021).
- [43](#). Sahay (1927), 16-18.
- [44](#). Shroder (1999), 191-96.
- [45](#). Stevenson (1974), 67-91.
- [46](#). Stevenson & Samararatne (1988), 221-25.
- [47](#). Mills & Lynn (2000); Mills ([2004](#)).
- [48](#). Sahay (1927), 9-15, under the nickname Vishwa Nath; Stevenson (1975) as Bishen Chand Kapoor.
- [49](#). Haraldsson ([2000](#)); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 88-93. There are differences between these accounts. The present summary follows the earlier, more detailed journal paper.
- [50](#). Rivas (2004, 2020); Rawat & Rivas (2021), 88-91.
- [51](#). Matlock, 2024a.
- [52](#). Leininger, B., & Leininger, A., with Gross, J. (2009).
- [53](#). See [here](#) for the documents uploaded to the Psi Open Source repository.
- [54](#). Tucker (2013, [2016](#)); Mills & Tucker (2013).
- [55](#). Matlock (2022a, 2022b).
- [56](#). Cockell (2008), 267-73; (2017), 23-40.
- [57](#). Cockell (2021), 31-32, 111-12. Cockell includes a photocopy of the list as an appendix in *Living with Past Lives* (2021, 165-73).
- [58](#). Cockell (1993), 65-67. The owner of the shop through which she ordered this map witnessed her first look at it in comparison with her drawing.
- [59](#). Cockell (1993, 2021).
- [60](#). Stevenson (2003), 210-22.
- [61](#). Tucker (2013), 88-119.
- [62](#). Matlock (2019, 2020).
- [63](#). Stevenson (1977).
- [64](#). Banerjee's investigation is described in detail by Rawat and Rivas (2021, 91-95).
- [65](#). Stevenson ([1997](#)), vol. 1, 468-91.

- [66.](#) Ohkado (2022).
- [67.](#) Mills, Haraldsson, & Keil ([1994](#)); Haraldsson & Matlock (2016), 84-88.
- [68.](#) Wehrstein (2019).
- [69.](#) Wehrstein (2021).
- [70.](#) Nahm ([2021](#)).
- [71.](#) Augustine ([2022](#)), 380.
- [72.](#) See the footnote in Augustine ([2022](#), 392); cf. Sudduth (2021).
- [73.](#) Matlock ([2022a](#), 2022b).
- [74.](#) Nahm ([2021](#)).
- [75.](#) Matlock (in preparation).