

THE ANDOVER CASE: A RESPONSIVE RAPPING
POLTERGEIST by Barrie G. Colvin. *Journal of the Society for
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ABSTRACT

An investigation into alleged poltergeist activity has been carried out at a house in Andover, Hampshire. The principal phenomenon was that of rapping sounds that, by means of a code, could produce meaningful messages. Attempts were made to exclude natural causes, including the transfer of the raps to objects that were under the close scrutiny of the observers. Effects were recorded which bear similarities to other rapping cases.

INTRODUCTION

Rapping poltergeists have been reported and closely investigated from very early times (Gauld & Cornell, 1979). Indeed, in almost 50% of the poltergeist cases listed by Gauld and Cornell, rapping sounds were described. This paper describes a previously unpublished case of alleged poltergeist activity that occurred in Andover in which the main reported phenomena consisted of rapping sounds of an intelligent nature emanating from various locations in response to questions posed by a number of persons. In this respect the case is rather unusual, particularly as the rapping phenomena could be evaluated at close quarters.

The case dates from 1974 when the author made nine visits to the house in question between 28 April and 10 June of that year. Full notes were made at the time of the investigation and a full report was written shortly afterwards. Only a brief summary of the principal observations has been presented previously (Colvin, 1977).

The details of the investigation were not submitted for publication until this time due to strict personal assurances concerning nondisclosure given to the family at the time of the investigation. Ten years after the events, the family reaffirmed their view that publication should not take place, even in a form that would largely retain their anonymity. However, since over 30 years have now passed, and the family moved away from the area many years ago, it was felt that the details of this case could now be published. Pseudonyms have been used throughout.

Background

The series of incidents which form the subject of this report took place at a Council-owned house at Andover in Hampshire. The house was built in the 1960s when Andover became part of the London overspill plan. At the time of the investigation the house was occupied by the eight members of the Andrews family, who had lived there for five years and had never experienced any strange or mysterious happenings prior to the outbreak of events in 1974. They stated that they had not previously heard of events such as these and had no significant knowledge of paranormal phenomena in general. I was first made aware of the various phenomena on 27th April 1974 following the publication of a story surrounding the events in a local newspaper (Anon, 1974). I was particularly interested in the reported

events for two reasons. Firstly, it appeared that the proceedings were on-going and regular. This would mean that the case could be investigated without having to wait for long periods of time between phenomena. The fact that the reported events were both recurrent and spontaneous led me to surmise that this case might be worthy of investigation. Secondly, the newspaper reports implied that the rapping sounds were not sporadic or random in nature; they were used regularly as a means of communication between the family members and the rapping entity.

The newspaper article described the occurrence of peculiar rapping sounds, which were causing the Andrews family some anxiety. The family consisted of the two parents, Mr and Mrs Andrews, as well as their six children—Maria (aged 20), Kevin (19), Gary (17), Steven (15), Theresa (12) and Mark (10). All family members had witnessed the events and it was reported that the entity had correctly given the girls' ages and forecast the results of two significant football matches. For these reasons I decided to investigate the case.

The house itself had ground-floor accommodation comprising a relatively spacious lounge, dining room, kitchen, hallway and a WC. The main door faced east and the house was one of a long line of terraced houses. At intervals, there was a gap between houses, this area forming a 2.4-metre-wide passageway between various streets within the housing estate. However, there was always a room above the passageway, as shown in Figure 1. The ground-floor end wall of the house, which faced north, formed one side of an alleyway, the other side being formed by the end wall of their neighbour. The first-floor area consisted of a landing, stairwell, boiler cupboard, airing cupboard, bathroom/WC and four bedrooms, including one which was situated directly over the alleyway. Theresa shared this bedroom with her elder sister, Maria. There were two single beds in the room as well as a wardrobe. Theresa occupied the bed adjacent to the partition wall, on the other side of which the neighbours resided. Since Theresa featured heavily in this case, it is perhaps worth pointing out that she was a very shy but pleasant girl, of small build, almost frail but otherwise physically sound. When relaxed, she was usually placid and rather unemotional. There was a feeling of loneliness about her and, although she was attractive, her friends were few. Maria, however, was quite lively, had a wide circle of friends, including a caring, handsome, boyfriend.

INVESTIGATION

First Interview

Rather than telephone the family, I decided to meet them face-to-face, as I felt that it would be easier to explain my interest and hopefully get their permission to conduct a full investigation. An exploratory visit was made to the house on 28th April 1974, when I met the family and heard their individual accounts of the experiences. The meeting was held in the lounge and all the members of the family were present. It was clear from the outset that the family was an apparently happy one and indications were in evidence that they enjoyed their home, having taken trouble to ensure that it was pleasantly decorated, clean and bright.

The family appeared to me to be reticent in coming forth with details at first, perhaps as a result of not fully understanding my own motives. I explained that I would give them an explanation as to why I was there and what I was hoping to achieve. I pointed out that firstly I would be trying to determine whether there was a normal, logical explanation for the phenomena. In doing so, I carefully explained that historically many supposed paranormal events were found to have normal explanations when properly investigated. I detailed some of my own investigations into Spiritualist circles and haunted houses, with emphasis on the careful nature of the investigations and the conclusion that many cases did not stand up to scientific scrutiny. I further explained that I would hope to be able to assess properly the nature of the tapping sounds and, if necessary, bring in specialists with experience in dealing with matters of this sort.

I was fully aware of the fact that the family may simply have been hoping that someone would be capable of eliminating these knocking sounds. Consequently, I explained that I had close links with the Spiritualist movement and with certain church practitioners who had shown great success in eliminating the presence of unusual phenomena. I then summarized the situation as I saw it, making it quite clear that I was interested in the scientific objectivity of such phenomena, and therefore had an interest in extending, rather than reducing, the period over which the strange occurrences manifest themselves. However, I reiterated the fact that at any time I would be happy to bring in a specialist with a view to eradicating these effects.

Having discussed the newspaper report, which Mr Andrews confirmed was accurate, I then asked him to give me a brief summary of events leading up to the present day. The following account summarizes the information received from him and other members of the family, some of whom found it more difficult to discuss the events than others.

The sounds were first heard by Theresa and Maria during the Easter weekend. The two girls explained that light tapping sounds were first heard when they lay quietly in bed on Good Friday, 12 April. At first they thought that the sounds were being made by someone next door, especially since the tapping sounds always emanated from the wall adjacent to Theresa's bed. However, the girls soon became convinced that this was not the real explanation because they obtained knocking replies to questions which Theresa whispered so softly that her sister Maria, lying in the adjacent bed, could hardly hear. They felt that in these circumstances no one in the adjacent house could have heard them talking. Maria and Theresa explained that at first they were not at all troubled by these events, which occurred nightly. In fact, they positively enjoyed the experience and looked forward to going to bed each evening.

A typical procedure would involve Theresa and Maria asking questions such as "Is anybody there?" A very definite single knock was heard, followed by silence. Theresa remembers that she started asking this question in a very low voice and still got a positive answer. This form of communication had been established within about a week of the initial onset of rapping sounds. Even when she whispered a question so quietly that she could hardly hear it herself, the knocking sound replied instantly and positively. The two girls became intrigued by these events and very soon developed a code

whereby a question would be asked and a yes/no answer given. One knock was taken to indicate yes and two knocks indicated no. If the answer was not known, the girls requested that three knocks should be given. Within a few days the whole family were asking questions and the coded communication was further improved in the following manner: the girls asked questions, which required an answer that was somewhat fuller than yes/no. It required words and sentences, which could be tapped out according to the position of the letters in the alphabet. For example, the letter E would be represented by five knocks, the letter M by thirteen knocks, and so on. In this way, long sentences were spelled out, sometimes taking several minutes to accomplish. At this point the communication was generally light-hearted, intriguing and something which the younger members of the family enjoyed. The parents, however, were rather concerned that they could not explain the phenomenon.

Before long, a standard procedure had been adopted whereby various members of the family would sit in the bedroom, Theresa would lie on her bed, and questions would be asked. In order for rapping sounds to be produced they found that it was usually essential for Theresa to lie on the bed. If she stood up they would not usually obtain raps. On some occasions the whole family would be involved and they all regarded these events as inexplicable but interesting and good-natured. Initially, there was never any occult or sinister interpretation placed upon these events and all family members regarded the sessions as a sort of game. It became normal practice for Theresa and Maria to communicate with the source of the rapping sounds whenever they retired to bed. In this way a happy rapport was established between the entity and the girls. Examples of their communication are given below :-

Theresa had asked the entity "What is your name?" Five knocks were counted and appeared to come from the wall, very close to Theresa's head as she lay on her bed.

Theresa asked, "Is that E?" A single knock was heard, indicating 'Yes'. Theresa asked for the next letter. Eighteen knocks were given and Theresa asked if the letter was R. The entity knocked once, again indicating that this was correct. In this way, the rapping continued and the entity indicated that its name was Eric.

Theresa then asked whether Eric had a surname, which was answered in the affirmative. This was then followed by a series of raps, which indicated that the full name was Eric Waters. It was not long before the whole family was engaged in a question and answer session with Eric with questions such as:-

Are you living or are you dead?

Why are you here?

When did you die?

How did you die?

Where are you?

Which football team is going to win the F.A. Cup final?

No matter what question was asked, a reply was usually forthcoming and was always understood by the whole family. Mr Andrews informed me that he placed bets on the horses based upon information given by Eric. When quizzed further about the level of success, he was not very forthcoming, stating only that the

information was often incorrect. The eldest son, Kevin, explained that Eric had told him that Leeds United football team would win the FA League competition and that Liverpool would win the FA Cup. When examined later, it was clear that these two football predictions were correct although the significance of this is rather unclear. The FA League result could have been guessed by any knowledgeable football supporter, as there were only a few days between the prediction and the actual game. Similarly, the FA Cup final was held less than a week after the prediction, so it was already known that there were only two teams left in the competition, Liverpool and Newcastle.

At this stage, the events, which took place in the bedroom, were regarded as a strange game for which no one could offer an explanation. Neighbours would call in to witness the events, as did the local clergy and the police, all intent on helping the family establish the cause of the strange phenomena. Theresa's room was sprinkled with Holy Water and a cross was placed on her window-sill. A medium from the local Andover Spiritualist Church paid a visit and explained that the house was haunted by the spirit of a young boy whose body was buried under the floorboards. According to her, the spirit of the boy was trying to take over the personality of Theresa. It was explained to Theresa that she must remain mentally strong to resist the effects of the unwanted spirit. Needless to say, these revelations were of some concern to the family and over a period of time the atmosphere during communication sessions became somewhat less jovial.

Visit on Tuesday, 30 April 1974

I had received a phone call from Mr Andrews at about 8:15 pm on 29 April 1974. He described how the family had been kept awake all night by the rapping entity, Eric. The knocking sounds had become much louder than normal and, despite numerous requests, would not abate. This had disturbed the family, who for the first time felt that Eric was purposely attempting to frighten them. No amount of pleading would get the loud rapping sounds to subside. This occurrence signalled the start of a change in attitude by the family. What had started out as an amusing game was now beginning to worry them. The parents were particularly concerned and wondered when these events would subside.

I arrived at the house at 2:30 pm on 30 April 1974 and was met by Mr and Mrs Andrews, who appeared to be in a totally different mood compared with two days earlier. Mr Andrews in particular looked tired and irritable. They invited me into the house and described the events of the previous evening. They recalled that it was a normal, fairly quiet evening when at about 6:30 pm knocking sounds were heard upstairs when all members of the family — including Theresa — were still downstairs. The first sounds were not gentle, as was normally the case, but began with a heavy, single bang. After a period of about 20 seconds, a series of loud rapping sounds were heard, after which Kevin and Gary raced upstairs. They reported that the sounds came from the same wall next to Theresa's bed. When Kevin asked: "Is that you, Eric?" a very loud thud was heard which shocked everyone. Over the next half-hour they listened to some rather sporadic knocking sounds, after which time the frequency

diminished considerably. Mr Andrews explained that the rapping sounds were most frequent and intense just prior to Theresa's bedtime. He therefore suggested that I return later when Theresa would be ready for bed. I agreed to return at about 8:30 pm.

At the agreed time I visited the Andrews family and found that all members were noticeably uneasy in their attitude. There was no sign of the normal, light-hearted exchanges, with Mr Andrews explaining that he was concerned that Eric might be in the same sort of mood that he had been in the previous evening. I sat in the lounge with Mr and Mrs Andrews for about an hour whilst Theresa and Maria, upstairs, attempted to make contact with Eric. I could hear them asking "Are you there, Eric?" "Do you want to talk to us, Eric?"

After a while, we could all hear gentle knocking sounds which appeared to emanate from upstairs. Mrs Andrews went up to join the girls and was soon heard to be joining in with the questions. I recall her asking: "Do you have a message for downstairs?" This was followed by a very emphatic single loud bang. For about 20 minutes I remained downstairs listening to the exchanges and discussing the possible explanations with Mr Andrews. He suggested that I might wish to join the others in Theresa's bedroom to witness the events at first hand. He explained, however, that they had noticed that whenever anyone new entered the bedroom the rapping sounds would abate, at least for a while. He therefore made the suggestion that I slowly ascend the stairs and initially stand outside the bedroom.

I did exactly as Mr Andrews suggested and actually stood at the top of the stairs, a very short distance from the bedroom entrance. From here it was possible to hear all conversations as well as the rapping sounds. Mrs Andrews continued to ask questions that required a yes/no answer. During the knocking episodes I could confirm that no one in the room was producing the sounds by normal means. I gradually edged forward until I was at the entrance to the bedroom, from where I could clearly hear and see all activity in the room. The questions and answers continued without falter when Mrs Andrews asked: "Eric, is it all right for Barrie to come into the room?" Again, a loud single knock was heard.

Following this, I slowly walked into the bedroom and stood beside the headboard end of Theresa's bed. Theresa was lying on top of her bed and Maria too was lying on her own bed with a light cover over her body. The rapping sounds continued and appeared to come from the centre of the wall adjacent to the bed. It was noticeable that when questions were answered by means of a series of knocks, the last rap in the series was often emphasized in a manner which indicated that it was indeed the last knock. Eric was asked how old he would have been if he had still been alive. There followed a very long series of raps, which began in a slow, clear manner. They then became more hurried and finally petered out altogether. During this time I was able to place my hands on the wall by leaning over Theresa's bed. It was possible to feel the vibration of the wall, but not possible to determine whether the knocking sounds were being generated next door. For a further fifteen minutes questions were asked and positive answers given. Mrs Andrews then asked Theresa whether she was tired. She replied that she was, following which Mrs Andrews suggested that we all retire to bed and get a good night's sleep. She said in a soft voice: "Goodnight Eric." A very soft but definite single rap was heard.

I left the bedroom and rejoined Mr Andrews in the lounge downstairs. He had been listening to the session and immediately asked the straightforward question: "What do you think is going on?"

We had a long discussion about the whole subject of poltergeist activity and it was clear that he had very little knowledge of the subject. I explained that although we don't yet understand the full meaning of these rappings, it was my considered opinion that the source of these rappings was not, as suggested by the Spiritualist medium, due to a ghost of a departed person. It was more likely to be due to an unknown energy, which is probably associated with the particular psychological dynamics present in the house at this time. I then put forward the desire to attempt to move the rapping sounds away from the wall and onto other items in the bedroom, perhaps a door or an item of furniture. This would be critical to the investigation in order to ensure that the sounds could not be emanating from the property next door. The discussion then led on to other poltergeist cases in the literature, including the Fox Sisters case of 1848.

I recounted to him the case of Virginia Campbell (Owen, 1964), who had been at the centre of similar activities in Scotland some years ago. Virginia never came to any harm and went on to live a normal life. The poltergeist manifestations were short-lived but nevertheless mysterious occurrences, but they had no long-lasting adverse effect upon Virginia. Mr Andrews was clearly relieved to hear this and thanked me for coming to visit the family. I left and promised to give him a call soon.

Visit on Thursday, 2 May 1974

Having thought deeply about the rapping sounds that I had witnessed on my previous visit, I discussed the situation with Mr and Mrs Andrews and asked whether they would be willing to help me carry out a few tests with a view to learning more about the rapping phenomenon. In particular, I felt that it would be most useful to attempt to control the position of the raps. It was clear to all that the rapping sounds were usually heard on the wall adjacent to Theresa's bed. Since this wall was the partitioning wall between their house and that of their neighbour, it could always be argued that someone was tapping normally on the other side of the partitioning wall.

I had previously noted that replies to questions were particularly clear when Mrs Andrews asked the questions. Both parents and Theresa agreed that this was the case, and so it was decided that Mrs Andrews should try to contact Eric again and ask him to tap out his messages in another part of the bedroom.

I walked upstairs to the bedroom, closely followed by Mrs Andrews and Theresa. I felt that it would be useful to attempt to move the position of the raps to another hard surface such as the headboard of the bed. Theresa took up her position on top of the bed, in full view of Mrs Andrews and me; I stood beside Theresa's bed, close to the window, and Mrs Andrews sat on the end of Maria's bed. We all remained silent for several minutes, after which Mrs Andrews said: "Eric, are you there?" There was no clear rap, but we all heard a strange scratching sound coming from a position on the wall just above Theresa's head. It lasted for about 10 seconds.

Mrs Andrews repeated the question but this time there was no answer at all. After about 20 minutes of failure to communicate, Theresa stated that Eric wasn't there and that we should leave it for now. At that point a loud double knock was heard on the wall. Mrs Andrews again asked whether Eric was there, and a clear single rap was heard, again coming from the same wall. She then asked whether Eric liked giving us messages. Again, a single rather loud rap was heard. After several minutes of similar activity, Mrs Andrews asked Eric if he would try to knock on the headboard of Theresa's bed. He indicated in the usual manner that he would.

She then said: "Eric, please try to knock on the headboard." This was followed by a very soft tap, which was heard by us all. I was at that moment standing very close indeed to the headboard, with my ear about 15 cm from it. As Mrs Andrews repeated the request, I put my hand on the headboard to see whether I could feel any sensation. Eric rapped progressively louder on the headboard and I could clearly feel the vibration. I noted, however, that on each occasion the onset of the vibration appeared to be slightly before the moment when we heard the rapping sound. (It is possible that this effect was purely subjective, but it felt real enough for me to make a note of it.)

By this time we all felt that Eric was co-operating well and we decided to try and move the raps to other places in the bedroom. I asked Mrs Andrews to continue her dialogue with Eric with a view to producing the raps on the metal frame of the bed. After some delay this was achieved and for several minutes we obtained raps from that area. It was noticeable that the sound of the rap was quite different from what we had become used to. The rapping sound appeared to be of a higher tone than that produced on either the wall or the wooden headboard.

We continued asking questions for a further 20 minutes, after which time the raps were becoming very soft indeed. Theresa said that she was now very tired and wished to go to bed, so the current, rather successful, episode was concluded. Mrs Andrews commented that Theresa had been feeling very tired for about a week and felt that she was not getting much sleep at night.

Having spent some time with the family and having evaluated their reactions to the events, I reflected on the facts as presented. It seemed apparent that the family had no previous experience of strange events of this type and knew little about paranormal activity in general. The rapping sounds were somewhat clearer than I had expected to witness and the coded communication with Eric was particularly effective. I was particularly pleased that successful knocking sounds could emanate from the headboard of Theresa's bed and that this occurred whilst I was in close proximity to it. For the first time I now felt that we had completely excluded the possibility of involvement from the neighbours.

Visit on Sunday, 5 May 1974

Mr Andrews phoned on the evening of May 4 to say that things had become very unnerving due to the loudness of the rapping sounds. Instead of the normal light-hearted exchanges with Eric, the family had experienced a rather different type of exchange, one in which Eric appeared to be rather angry or frustrated. As a result of the very loud rapping sounds, several people had gathered around the house

and the sounds could be heard for some distance down the street. As it was quite a densely populated housing estate, it was not long before many people had come to see what was happening.

When I arrived on the morning of 5 May, the whole family was sitting in the lounge. They recounted the events of the previous evening, which started as normal with Theresa asking some questions about Eric's life here on earth. The rapping sounds were described as being very clear and answers were given as normal, sometimes with a touch of humour. She had received messages that Eric's bones were definitely underneath the house and that he wanted someone to dig below the floor of the lounge and retrieve them. The family went on to explain that Eric made the suggestion that the bones could be taken to a graveyard and buried in an appropriate place. When Kevin started asking questions, the rapping sounds ceased for a while — in the region of half an hour. Mr Andrews explained that Kevin then started a different format of questioning:

"Are you there, Eric?"

(No answer) "I think you've gone away."

(No answer) "I don't think you ever really existed."

This was followed by a single, very loud, bang. "Eric, I don't believe that you were ever a real person."

Another single loud bang followed. "I think you're a liar, Eric."

This was followed by a long series of very loud thuds, almost as if Eric was now feeling upset. After a brief pause of about 30 seconds, the loud knockings began again. They would then stop for a while before commencing again even louder. This went on for about an hour and there appeared to be no way to stop these intense knocking sounds. After a gap of about an hour, the events recommenced in similar manner until the early hours of the morning. They ranged from a series of very loud knocks, as if Eric was simply looking for attention, to more specific replies to questions posed by the family. Even when they had finally ceased, each member of the family was prevented from sleeping due to the anticipation of hearing further knocking sounds.

The family had given a joint account of the above episode, which had clearly affected them all. They woke up early in anticipation of my visit. Within a few minutes of my arrival Mrs Andrews had asked me to find someone who could help in removing the offending entity so that they could return to their normal lives. Whilst I sat with the parents in the lounge, Theresa and Kevin were trying to make contact with Eric in the usual bedroom. I could hear Theresa asking in a very quiet voice: "Are you there, Eric?" There was no reply.

Kevin, who clearly felt that he knew how to get Eric to respond, then shouted: "Eric I think you're a bloody great liar!" Immediately we could all hear a loud knock. Everyone raced upstairs to join Theresa and Kevin in the bedroom. I recall that Theresa was looking very shocked, pale and by now rather tearful.

Kevin continued, "You are, Eric, you're a liar and you are not underneath the house." The response was a long series of very loud knocks.

Mrs Andrews said that she was not staying and went back downstairs.

I gently moved towards Theresa's bed and was able to ascertain that the knocking sounds came from the wooden headboard of the bed. The headboard was a simple wooden structure composed of two main uprights and a top horizontal baton screwed to the uprights. The space between the uprights consisted of eight pieces of thin wooden rod in the shape of four crosses. These were designed to give additional rigidity to the bed-head. This very simple structure would have prevented the use of any concealed apparatus designed to produce rapping sounds on the bed-head by normal means.

I placed my left hand on the horizontal upper section of the headboard and was clearly able to feel the vibration of the wood at the precise moment that a loud rapping sound was heard. At this point, Theresa was lying on her bed, there was no significant movement from anyone else in the room and the ambient light conditions were good. Kevin continued with his rather pointed remarks and Eric continued to produce a very loud series of replies. By this time the communication was good with very few errors being made in determining the letters being spelt out by Eric. Clearly, under such close scrutiny it was quite obvious that no fraudulent activity was taking place, or that the effects could be produced by simple changes in ambient conditions.

Visit on Tuesday, 7 May 1974

I had hoped to be able to bring along an experienced medium so as to attempt to contact the ostensible discarnate personality and indeed had made arrangements for a well-known and highly respected Spiritualist to join me for this visit but unfortunately, at the last moment, the person in question was unable to attend. It had been hoped that he would perhaps shed some light on the force responsible for the coded messages.

Nevertheless, I again visited the Andrews family on a day when Kevin had taken it upon himself to purposely upset Eric as he had done in the past. Whilst this process led to nervous feelings within the family, it did have the positive effect of giving rise to significant knocking sounds which on this visit could be heard for some distance. As I arrived, I noted that about twenty people had gathered in the passageway directly below Theresa's bedroom. Kevin and Theresa were in the bedroom and Kevin was shouting at Eric in a similar manner to that of the previous week. The banging sounds were quite deafening and were coming from the vicinity of the wall next to Theresa's bed. I placed my hand on the wall and could feel the vibration of it. I returned to the small gathering of people outside and we all placed our hands on the outside surface of the wall, at ground level in the passageway. The vibration was felt by everyone and the knocking sound was again very loud, although not as loud as in Theresa's bedroom. I walked from the alleyway towards the back of the house and continued in a north-westerly direction towards the next street. Whilst standing at least 50 yards from the alleyway, I could still hear the rapping sounds. They lasted for a full half hour after which, to everyone's relief, they stopped suddenly and were not heard again that day.

Visit on Saturday, 11 May 1974

Mr Andrews had informed me that there had been no further activity for several days. Nevertheless, I decided to visit the family again, partly to gain some feel for how they were now coping. We had a long conversation regarding the possible reasons for the manifestations and the family agreed that no harm had come to anyone. Indeed, we all recognized that Eric was just a typical poltergeist who was having some fun and would probably retreat to his proper place in due course.

During a telephone conversation on 21 May, I was informed by Mr Andrews that things had been relatively quiet for about two weeks. There had been a few occasions, just as Theresa was about to fall asleep, when she heard some soft raps. He informed me that she had asked Eric to try to guess a number that she was thinking of. According to Theresa, Eric had managed to guess correctly on every occasion. This fact reminded me of the ad-hoc tests carried out during the investigation of the Derrygonnelly case (Barrett, 1911). On the basis that the information reported was correct, it would be important to put the claim to the test. Consequently, we made an arrangement to perform this test in the near future.

Visit on Thursday, 23 May 1974

Mr Andrews telephoned to say that Eric had been responding well to questions put to him by Theresa. They had reverted to the relaxed, friendly manner of communication, ensuring that Kevin was not allowed to cause a disturbance as he had done in the past. Mr Andrews felt that there was sufficient co-operation to allow us to perform the test and I arrived at their home at about 1:30 pm.

Having prepared a total of 40 shuffled cards, each one depicting a number from 1 to 10 (i.e. 4 sets), I carried out several runs in the following manner: Theresa was lying on her bed, face down, with her head turned slightly towards the wall. Mrs Andrews and Kevin sat on Maria's bed and I stood close to the window, facing Theresa. I picked a card at random and showed it to everyone in the room, including Theresa, without actually stating what the number was. I held it up so that it faced the wall and asked Eric to tap out the number on the card. Four slow but definite raps were heard to come from the wall. The last rap was louder than the others. After the fourth rap, I continued to hold the card in place in case any further raps were forthcoming. When it was clear that the rapping had finished, I confirmed to Eric that the answer was correct. This procedure was repeated five times and on each occasion Eric produced the correct number of raps.

The tests were then continued in a slightly different manner. I picked a card out of the pack and, ensuring that Theresa was facing the wall, looked at the number in such a manner that no one else in the room could see it. Again I held it up, facing the wall and asked Eric to tap out the number. In one series of 7 tests, all calls were correct. However, in another set of 10 tests, two numbers were incorrect, each being one short of the required value. As a final test, I repeated the procedure but in this case I didn't look at the cards before holding them up to the wall. In this set, again two numbers were wrong out of a total of ten.

By this time I had become certain that, whatever was responsible for the rapping sounds, they were not coming from someone on the

other side of the wall. The fact that these number tests had been largely successful, and that the raps had been produced during previous visits on surfaces other than the wall, led to the conclusion that the occupants of the house next door were not responsible. I was aware that the rapping phenomena were rather similar to those apparently produced by the Fox sisters (Buescher, 2004), with the obvious connection between the rapping phenomena and the popular interpretation of spirit involvement. For this reason, and bearing in mind the clear cooperation currently being achieved with Eric, I felt that we should try to obtain information, which, on the basis of a discarnate entity hypothesis, would be verifiable through historical records.

With all participants still in the room, Eric was asked rather simple questions about his family, his mother's name, his date of birth, etc. Although clear rapping sounds were obtained in answer to our various questions, many of the answers were simply given as three knocks, indicating that he did not know the answer. When asked how long ago he died, a very long series of raps were produced which became almost inaudible for a period and impossible to count with any accuracy. Despite an apparent willingness to produce raps in reply to our questions, we were unable to find out much about Eric and concluded that he seemed to know very little about his life. It does at first appear rather strange that Eric was able to perform rather well in the series of card-guessing tests but had been rather poor in answering apparently simple questions, particularly with regard to details about himself and his family. However, on the basis that the most likely source of information is not from a discarnate entity, which one might expect to remember significant past events, the lack of detail may not be too surprising. One is reminded of the specific and detailed information that was forthcoming in the Philip series of sittings, information that was ostensibly derived from the minds of the sitters (Owen & Sparrow, 1976). It has to be remembered that the Philip group invented their communicative personality and his imaginary background was well known to all participants. Consequently, much detailed information about his life was forthcoming during the very successful series of sittings of the Philip group. It is suggested that if details relating to Eric similarly derived from the mind of Theresa, and if she had a rather incomplete picture of Eric's family history, it was perhaps to be expected that Eric would be unable to formulate answers to some apparently simple questions. We did, however, ask him whether we could attempt to photograph him and a very definite single rap was heard. Following some discussion amongst ourselves, it was decided that I should return at a later date with the express objective of trying to capture an image on film.

Visit on Friday, 7 June 1974

During this visit I was accompanied by Dr Reinhart Schiffauer, a Senior Scientist at the Egham Research Laboratories in Surrey. I had known Dr Schiffauer for about a year and felt that he could be relied upon to approach the subject in an objective manner. He had already explained to me that he had no experience of paranormal events and regarded himself as an "open-minded sceptic". In view of the fact that Eric had confirmed his desire to help us with producing

photographs, Dr Schiffauer had sourced the necessary cameras and films.

The procedure started in the normal manner with Theresa lying on her bed. Also present in the bedroom besides myself, were Dr Schiffauer and Mr and Mrs Andrews. The last-named, who seemed to have developed a close rapport with Eric, asked if he was there. One knock indicated that he was. There was soon a healthy dialogue going on, probably as good as had ever been witnessed. When I asked if Theresa needed to be present in order for rapping sounds to be forthcoming, Eric answered no (two knocks). I asked him to knock loudly and he replied with a very soft tap. This was repeated. Theresa suggested that I ask him to knock softly. He replied with a loud, emphatic knock, almost in a playful mood. He apparently had little concept of time and often, when asked about a specific time period, had difficulty tapping out the requisite number of raps. However, when a long series of raps was required, it was of interest to note that, as in previous sessions, the last knock in the series was usually emphasized. For example, when I asked him how long ago he died, there was a rapid series of knocks, which towards the end became more precise and ended with a forceful knock, apparently to indicate that it was the last one.

During this visit we attempted to take a photograph of Eric, on the basis of the notion that he would be able to help us determine the correct positioning of the camera by knocking appropriately. We used high-speed black-and-white film as well as colour infrared film. All photographs were taken during the daytime with the bedroom curtains open, both with and without infrared flash. I wondered whether Eric could actually see us and immediately heard a strong emphatic "yes" in the form of a single rap. Eric was asked to rap whenever the camera was pointing in the right direction. Using this method, Eric was found to be particularly co-operative and a number of photographs were taken. On many occasions the relevant point of interest was on the bedroom wall close to the headboard of the bed. However, despite taking many photos under a variety of conditions, we were unable to capture anything unusual on the film.

A more successful experiment involved the tapping out of numbers which were held up. Theresa was ready for bed and lay underneath the bed-covers. As before, the cards with the numbers 1 to 10 were used. They were shuffled and the top card taken and held up in the room. At this stage no effort was made to conceal the number from those present in the room. When we asked for the first number to be tapped out, six clear raps were heard. This corresponded to the number on the card. It is interesting to note that the raps were relatively quiet but were tapped out slowly and purposefully as though with great concentration. A second card was held up and again the correct number of raps (four) were forthcoming.

Again on this occasion, Eric wished to provide a rather complex and detailed message. This involved a significant time period over which complete sentences were spelled out, one letter at a time. Dr Schiffauer and I left the bedroom to speak with Mr Andrews downstairs. Theresa and her mother were left alone in the bedroom, although we had left the tape recorder running but unattended in Theresa's bedroom. Mrs Andrews had asked Eric if he had a further message for them. A single knock indicated that he had. She asked

for the first letter to be knocked (9 knocks, indicating "F") and continued to obtain a full sentence: "I am here to rest and stop my bones from rotting."

It should be noted that following each set of knocks, during which Mrs Andrews had mentally counted through the alphabet, she would state the relevant letter in order for Eric to affirm that it was correctly identified. He would knock once in affirmation and twice if it was wrongly determined by her. In those instances where she incorrectly stated a wrong letter, later examination of the tape recording indicated that Eric had knocked the correct number of times but that Mrs Andrews had incorrectly counted through the alphabet.

During the course of this message, several significant points were noticed. Firstly, it was confirmed that the quality of the knocks was very good—this has been noticed before when Mrs Andrews and Theresa were alone together. Secondly, there are several instances where Mrs Andrews had called out a particular letter of the alphabet, which was wrong. Eric would knock twice to indicate that fact. On one occasion, for example, Eric tapped out 20 raps in a row. Mrs Andrews asked "S?" There were two loud knocks to indicate "No". Just at the precise moment when she asked "T?", Eric produced one loud rap to indicate that "T" was the correct letter. It was as if Eric was aware of what Mrs Andrews was about to say. This phenomenon was noticed on several occasions. Halfway through the above message, having heard from downstairs that the rapping phenomena were now in full flow, Dr Schiffauer and I slowly crept upstairs and entered the bedroom, trying as much as possible to minimize interference with the successful proceedings. We were able to get very close to the point where the raps were coming from. However, the point of origin appeared to vary slightly and as it did so the subjective nature of the rapping sounds also changed. Further attempts were made to take photographs. However, very little co-operation was forthcoming from Eric and after repeated requests for help in directing the camera, all to no avail, we decided to pack up our equipment and leave the family to prepare for bed.

The following day I asked Dr Schiffauer to summarize his feelings about the visit, which he did in a letter to me, dated 9 June 1974. In this letter he confirmed the events as described above. The original letter is held in the SPR archives.

Visit on Monday, 10 June 1974

My final visit to the house followed a telephone conversation with Mr Andrews in which he stated that it was becoming very difficult to get a response from Eric. There had only been a couple of very soft knocks over the past two days. He felt that during the particularly good session on the previous Friday, Eric had communicated his thoughts and no longer felt the need to continually spell out the same message time after time.

I arrived at 7:30 pm and spent some time in the lounge with the parents. Gary and Theresa were upstairs trying to get a response from Eric but with no success. I joined them, followed shortly afterwards by Mrs Andrews. She took control of the questions and spoke in a familiar tone:—"Eric, are you there?" *No answer.* "Eric, have you got a message for us?" *No answer.*

After about 15 minutes of questioning, Theresa announced that Eric had gone, and gone for ever. She explained that she simply felt, and was quite sure, that Eric had passed on his message and no longer needed to say anything to us. A discussion took place as to who Eric could have been and whether his bones would ever be found underneath the house. The general feeling amongst the family members was that at some stage in the future the bones would be discovered, proving that Eric was a real person. I put it to the family that in my view the rapping sounds were probably not coming from a discarnate entity at all, despite the fact that Eric purported to be the intelligence behind the rapping sounds. They made it quite clear that they thought my interpretation was incorrect but nevertheless were happy to accept that we would probably never know for certain.

The Search for Eric

In an attempt to determine whether a discarnate entity by the name of Eric Waters could have been responsible for the rapping sounds, a number of interviews were conducted in the area around Andover. The surname of Waters is relatively common in Andover, most of them being derived from two separate families within the town. A visit to Mr Charles Waters of Finkley Down Farm, Andover and his son Mr H. Waters confirmed no recollection of an Eric in the family. Mr C. Waters of London Road was interviewed. He remembered most people in the family back to about 1900 (he was 86 years old) but there was no recollection of an Eric Waters. He stated, however, that the Waters' farm at one time extended to the site of the current Twinings tea factory on the A3093 road, about 200 metres from the Council house in question.

A visit was made to Mr P. H. Davis of Tollgate Road, Andover (a local historian). He had drawn up a family tree for the larger of the two Waters families, dating back to the late 17th Century. However, there was no record of an Eric.

A Mr H. J. Smallbones of The Drove, Andover explained that he once owned the land on which the house now stands. It was used as a caravan site from 1946 to 1960 and before that was waste ground used occasionally by travelling gypsies.

Mr E. Waters of Batchelors Barn Road, Andover was the eldest member of the other main Waters family. He could not recall an Eric Waters and further enquiries with other members of his family were also unsuccessful.

A visit was made to Mr M. Loveridge of Highlands Road, Andover. He is a well-known historian and author of several books on the history of Andover. He stated that there is a record of someone having been murdered, by hanging, at Drunken Tree Drove around 1890. The Drunken Tree itself, where the hanging took place, was close to the Twinings tea factory in the close vicinity of the house. Apparently, the murdered person's name was never recorded.

The Editor of the local newspaper was approached for assistance in trying to find Eric. He published an article in the *Southern Evening Echo* (Earney, 1974) and asked for information relating to a possible Eric Waters. However, nothing was forthcoming.

An examination of the local *Register of Births and Deaths* from 1837 onwards found no reference to Eric Waters. However, in this period two boys were born who were un-named at the time of entry.

The first was born to a Mr and Mrs A. Waters in June 1878, the second to Mr and Mrs S. Waters of New Street, Andover in 1897.

Following this investigation, it had to be concluded that there was no reference to an Eric Waters in the Andover area.

I had no preconceived ideas before entering the house on 28th April 1974, but I was fully aware of the possible methods of producing effects of this type by normal means. It has been suggested that poltergeist phenomena can be explained by one of three known causes — observational error, non-personal mechanical forces and deception (see Houran & Lange, 2001). It is felt that in this case the first two theories can immediately be ruled out for the following reasons. The phenomena were observed at very close quarters, over a significant period of time, by observers who were initially rather sceptical of paranormal claims. Had the reported effects been witnessed in dim light or at a significant distance from the observers, it would have been possible to invoke the theory of observational error. However, this was clearly not the case. The theory of non-personal mechanical forces includes the possibility of poltergeistlike effects resulting from vibrations caused by underground water movements. General areas of known ground subsidence or shock waves from blasting operations have also been put forward as possible explanations in some poltergeist cases. It is clear that in the Andover case we are not discussing the sudden unexpected movement of objects within the house; we are discussing a lengthy series of knocking sounds, capable of providing intelligent messages using a code. The idea that non-personal mechanical forces could explain these responsive phenomena cannot be seriously considered.

The only normal explanation that was ever justified for further consideration was that of deception and only then during the initial phases of the investigation. During the period when rapping sounds were heard from the partitioning wall only, the deception theory was regarded as a possible explanation of events — not because there was any evidence positively to suggest this, but simply because it could not at that stage be ruled out. It was for this reason that it was important and ultimately significant that the rapping sounds be made to emanate from objects other than the partitioning wall between the Andrews' home and that of their neighbours. It is this aspect of the case that makes it so different from other reported cases. Eric's mood, as judged by the manner in which rapping sounds were made, appeared to change from being rather playful to being annoyed. During periods when the coded messages were detailed and continued for a significant period of time, it was felt that the intelligence was making a real effort to communicate. The level of co-operation was highlighted by the manner in which he was prepared to produce rapping sounds in areas specified by the investigators.

On the basis that one's conclusions about any unusual event are bound to be affected by one's own personal involvement, I have often reflected on the experience of feeling the tapping sounds emanating from the headboard of the bed whilst I placed my hand lightly upon it. I remain quite certain that this effect, which was experienced in good daylight, was not produced by normal means by anyone in the room at the time. The vibration that could be felt, and which was almost synchronized with the audible tapping sound, led me to

conclude that the rapping sounds were produced in a manner which I have not been able to explain by normal means.

In many ways the phenomena were similar to those expected in a traditional poltergeist case. The effects were only encountered when Theresa was present in the house. The requirement for a young poltergeist focus is very common in the literature, Gauld and Cornell (1979) recording that 30% of cases summarized by them involved a poltergeist focus under the age of 20 years. It is clear that Theresa had no conscious control over Eric or the rapping sounds. The commonly held theory that the phenomena are in some manner the outcome of an emotional state or conflict cannot in this case be verified, as there was no evidence to suggest that such a state of mind existed. However, it is fair to say that an in-depth psychological evaluation of the situation was never carried out. Had it been, it may have revealed stress or emotional conditions within the family more in line with those normally regarded as prerequisites for this type of activity. It may also be surmised that the level of anxiety is related to the type and intensity of the observed phenomena. Since this case exhibited rapping sounds only, it may be that a lower level of emotional stress would be required for mild phenomena of this type compared with other reported effects, such as the movement of large objects. Consequently, for mild effects of this type, it may be more difficult to find the suppressed tension evidence without a full psychological testing regime.

The other major interpretation put forward for phenomena of this type is that of the 'discarnate entity'. Whilst the evidence for an unnatural force being responsible for the rapping sounds is strong, and whilst there is no specific 'suppressed tension' evidence supporting the theory of a living person hypothesis, there is also no significant evidence to support the discarnate entity interpretation. No verifiable information was derived from Eric to suggest the existence of a personality outside the confines of Theresa's mind. This conclusion would, however, need to be modified if human remains were at some future date to be found under the house in question. At present this remains conjecture. The fact that the rapping sounds provided meaningful messages has no bearing on the likelihood of either theory being more applicable. It has previously been suggested that where meaningful communication by raps has been a major feature of a poltergeist case, the discarnate entity theory should be regarded as more likely (Stevenson, 1972). However, I fail to understand this rather strange differentiation between the two interpretations. There is no reason to assume that if intelligent communication is witnessed by means of rapping sounds, then the source of that intelligence must be from a discarnate entity. Overall, the evidence suggests to me that the 'living person' hypothesis is the more probable interpretation in this case.

The specific nature of the rapping sounds shows similarities with other cases cited in the literature. Particular comparisons can be drawn with the case of Karin (Wijk, 1905) a twenty-year-old, delicately formed girl who was at the centre of outbreaks in southern Sweden in the late 1890s. Often raps would be heard whilst Karin was at the point of dozing off, and communication was effected by means of a code. As with Theresa, sometimes the raps obeyed the commands of the questioner and on other occasions, as though out of defiance, the opposite of what had been asked for took place. The

intensity of the raps varied widely in both cases. On occasions, the raps could hardly be heard but at other times the intensity was immense. In the case of Eric, some of the loudest raps were heard during the daytime, in conditions of high ambient light. However, this was never the case with Karin. Another marked difference between the two cases is that the Andover case always involved rapping or scratching sounds only. The Karin case also involved the visual appearance of "a peculiar kind of radiance in the room" on two occasions when people were sitting in the dark.

The ease with which meaningful communication was possible in the Andover case is relatively uncommon, although somewhat similar events were described in the Cideville case of 1850 (Lang, 1904). A marked resemblance is evident in the manner in which the raps were delivered. It is recorded that when a certain question was asked "eight raps were heard, the last more distinct than the others, apparently to make one understand that it was the last". As described earlier, this same effect was often witnessed in the Andover case.

The series of tests carried out with cards were rather few in number but tended to indicate that there was a significant degree of success. The results were generally correct or, if not, very close to the correct answer. These tests show marked similarities with the Derrygonnelly case (Barrett, 1911), where the correct number of raps was given, even when no words were spoken at all. Professor Barrett stated that "To avoid any error or delusion on my part, I put my hands in the side pockets of my overcoat and asked it to knock the number of fingers I had open. It correctly did so. Then, with a different number of fingers open each time, the experiment was repeated four times in succession, and four times I obtained absolutely the correct number of raps."

I referred earlier to the apparent ability of Eric to have advance knowledge of the letter of the alphabet that Mrs Andrews was about to call out. He also tapped out the answer to a question that had not yet been finished. This was a relatively common occurrence during long periods of messages, where Mrs Andrews did not always correctly determine the letter being rapped out. In all instances that were tape-recorded, it has been verified that Eric always tapped out the correct letter, but it was not always correctly identified at first. This aspect of the case is similar to reported events at the McCardle case (Flammarion, 1924), where raps "were often given before the question was quite finished".

However, with regard to predictions, there is no clear evidence that Eric was able to predict significantly the outcome of future events. Mr Andrews' experience with gambling on the horses had some successes but there were also failures, details of which were difficult to determine. The predictions about the football results have already been discussed and do not warrant further consideration.

In summary, it can be concluded that the Andrews family, Reinhart Schiffauer and I were unable to determine a natural cause for the rapping sounds in this case. I was particularly intrigued by the vibrations, which could be felt at the time of the rappings, and the relative ease with which the sounds could be produced on various items of furniture in good daylight conditions. As far as I am aware, no further rapping sounds were heard at the house after my last visit.