

ALPHA

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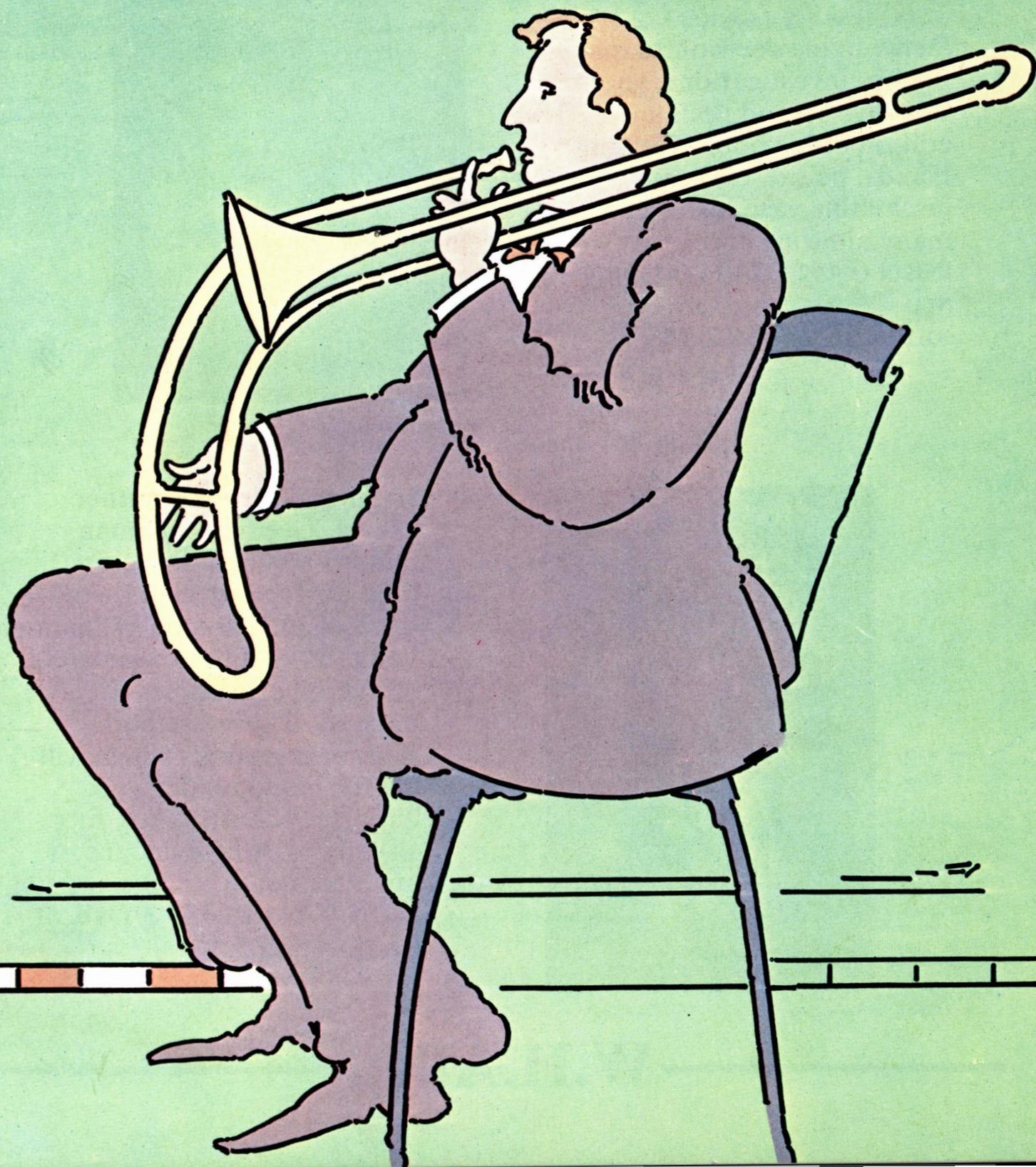
March/April 1979

PROBES THE PARANORMAL

Will Premonitions save California?

Michael Bentine: psychic researcher

The Geller effect - a new twist to metal bending



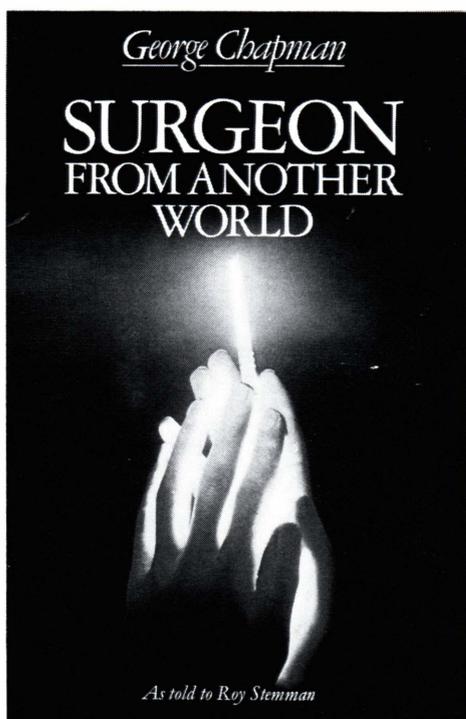
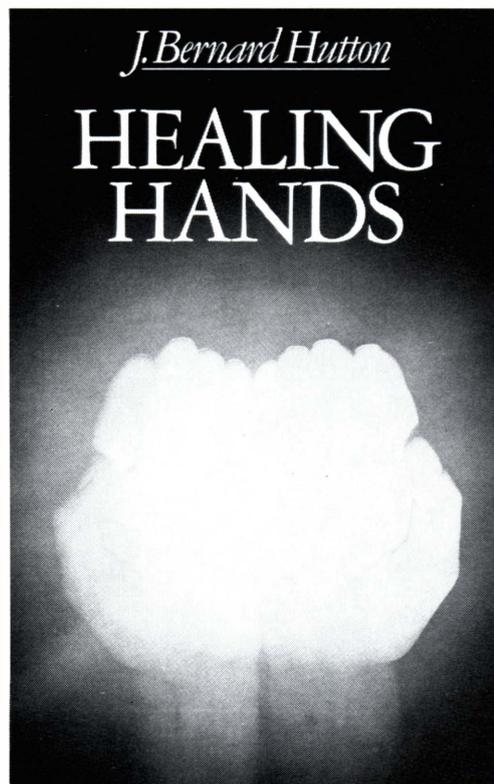
Myth or Miracle?

For J. Bernard Hutton it was a miracle when he met the fireman turned medium, George Chapman. He was cured of his threatened blindness. It was the crucial factor in his decision to make further investigations, and in this revised and updated edition of his book, **Healing Hands**, he presents many fascinating case histories of many amazing cures.

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In **Surgeon from Another World**, George Chapman himself reveals for the first time how, controlled by the spirit of the surgeon William Lang, he is able to 'operate' on the etheric bodies of patients. These are both astonishing books which will be, for many readers, an important contribution to already existing evidence of life after death.

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W.H.Allen

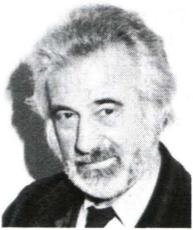
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Introducing Alpha

The rapid advance of science and the growing dependence of our society on technical wonders like computers and lasers have not dealt the expected death blow to belief in paranormal phenomena. Indeed, there has been something of an explosion of interest in the mysteries of time and space. Old enigmas, like ghosts and poltergeists, have been joined by new ones, such as metal bending and UFOs.

Is that interest no more than escapism? Or does it mirror a genuine and justified belief that there is much more to life than meets the eye?

We believe that there *are* areas of the paranormal that deserve serious investigation, not only because the evidence justifies it but also because, if such phenomena are confirmed, the implications would be tremendous.

Books proliferate on the subject. Volumes which attempt to further our knowledge about psychokinesis, healing and mediumship rub shoulders with sensational and far from convincing claims about geographical triangles, where ships and

The alpha connection

Ever since investigators started to monitor brainwave patterns, they have been puzzling over the full significance of alpha waves. Alpha is the tag given to waves within a certain frequency range that lie between the characteristic patterns of waking, active life (called beta) and the slower rhythms in sleeping or unconscious states (theta and delta).

Reams of research papers have been written on the subject – there are over 1000 on alpha waves alone. What excited researchers was the discovery that certain brainwave patterns were associated with particular states of mind.

For some time, investigators have been monitoring the brain wave patterns of experienced meditators, including Zen practitioners and Yogis. They discovered several things from this, particularly that the patterns of meditators were stable, symmetrical in the two hemispheres of the brain and invariably showed high amplitude alpha waves. In contrast, the beta patterns of the active mind are irregular, unstable and highly asymmetrical.

Parapsychologists, too, have used electroencephalographs to study subjects with alleged paranormal powers and, again, there seems to be a significant amount of alpha produced when they are working psychically.

Virtually everyone is capable of producing alpha waves. They usually appear when you shut your eyes, stop thinking and let your mind drift. Few people generate waves of this frequency with open eyes when the senses bombard the mind with data.

People interested in biofeedback noted the connection. So, following the principle of biofeedback, they devised small machines that told the person trying to relax or meditate when they were generating alpha: small

electrodes on the scalp are connected to the monitor which produces a tone that tells the individual that they're in an alpha state. The biofeedback theory is that the audible signal reinforces the subjective experience of relaxation and helps you achieve this desired state more easily.

But alpha waves on their own are by no means the full story. They may be a common denominator between some altered states of consciousness, but they are often accompanied by other brainwaves, as Max Cade and Geoffrey Blundell discovered.

For several years, they have been using a remarkable piece of equipment they developed called the Mind Mirror, which is essentially a portable EEG machine, to study meditators, paranormal healers and others on different levels of consciousness (including dowsers). Instead of giving a read-out on paper, the Mind Mirror shows with beautiful clarity what the brain wave pattern is in each hemisphere of the brain on a panel of lights. It gives an instant picture of which brainwaves are being generated and at what amplitude.

Studies with the Mind Mirror have shown that there is a range of characteristic patterns. One of the most important, known as State Five in Cade's classification, is found among experienced meditators and healers. Like other patterns, it is symmetrical. Alpha is present and there are side bands of beta and theta also.

Scientific instrumentation of this sort is helping to bring a harder edge to research into meditation, altered states of consciousness and paranormal abilities. It has not told all, though. In some respects, as in the suspected special importance of alpha waves, it might have provided valuable clues, but it has raised many new questions. At least it helps to make the business of probing the paranormal less a matter of speculation and more a matter of debatable, scientific fact.

planes disappear, and contacts with flying saucers . . . all thrown together on the shelves under the collective heading 'the occult'. *Alpha* will tackle all these questions and many more – and they will receive a thorough examination.

Alpha, then, is not a magazine devoted to promoting the paranormal. Sceptics and critics will be made as welcome as the advocates. We are interested in the facts and our aim, in providing this platform for news and views about unexplained phenomena, is to help get closer to the truth. That does not mean that we will dissect every claim and theory, or take sides in debates. Often we will present just one side of an argument – but our columns will be open for dissenting views.

The problem that faces us is that many of the phenomena which will be dealt with by *Alpha* will seem to some readers to be too impossible even to justify examination. Sir Oliver Lodge had the same problem in the 19th century when discussing the psychic investigations carried out by Sir William Crookes: 'It is almost as difficult to resist the testimony as it is to accept the things testified.' It is a challenge which *Alpha* will meet head on.

NEWS

Australian TV crew films UFO over New Zealand

WHAT was it that an Australian TV crew filmed in the sky above New Zealand on December 29? The film was shown around the world and appeared to depict a large spherical object. Ground radar also picked up a UFO at the same time.

The television and press reports, however, do not give enough information yet to be able to make positive identification possible. Sceptics have suggested that film of the planet Venus would produce the same sort of pictures. Others have argued that it was a fireball or a flare sent up by squid fishermen.

But the testimony of witnesses in the aircraft suggests that the UFO changed position in response to the plane's change of direction. The pilot, Capt Bill Startup, first picked up a radar blip of an object which was travelling at an estimated 1,000 mph. According to the *Daily Telegraph's* Melbourne reporter the UFO then made a turn towards the plane.

Ground radar also picked up a UFO at the same time, apparently, but not enough information is available to say if it coincided with the airborne radar or with the visual and filmed sighting.

Alpha will deal with this important case, and other Australasian UFO events, in the next issue. The current UFO 'epidemic' down under dates from October 1978 when a young pilot vanished after reporting an encounter with a strange object. The full story appears on Page 7.

Another Australian TV team has also taken film of a UFO – from the ground. The films are being examined by scientists.



The New Zealand UFO . . . as seen by British TV viewers.

Untimely end

ONE OF the most celebrated personalities in the field of parapsychology in recent years – Philip – has died. His demise is recorded in the September 1978 issue of *New Horizons*, the journal of the Toronto-based New Horizons Research Foundation.

Philip attracted visitors from many countries who were able to witness his remarkable feats. He was the subject of a book. He appeared on television. And yet, when the end came, he was only five years old.

What makes the story of Philip even more remarkable is that he was not a living person at all. He was 'conjured up' by a group of people in Toronto who invented a fictitious history for Philip and then endeavoured to make contact with the non-existent character.

Not only did they succeed in receiving messages from him – in which he confirmed all the make-believe elements of the story – but they also found him to be far more tangible than they had expected. They received numerous physical phenomena, such as rappings and even metal

bending, all of which they attributed to the man they dreamed up.

But, having invented him, they eventually were at a loss to know what to do with him. Having exhausted the research programme and having made no further progress with their regular sessions, the group decided to kill Philip off in the autumn of 1977.

The full story of Philip will be told in the next issue of *Alpha*.

On the Dragon's Trail

Ever since Alfred Watkins unleashed his controversial claims that a web of invisible straight lines, or leys, linking stone circles and other prehistoric sites, crisscrosses the countryside, there has been a running battle between those who think he's right and those who say it's a lot of mystical nonsense.

The main antagonists are the growing community of ley hunters and those orthodox archaeologists who consider the intrusion of these enthusiastic newcomers into their domain, an irritating nuisance. But if opinions have largely been the basis for disagreement so far, harder evidence is becoming available which should elevate the debate to a higher level.

Paul Devereux, the editor of *The Ley Hunter*, a neatly-designed specialist magazine, bubbling with news and views about leys and related earth mysteries, is one of those involved in launching a massive, scientific survey to tease out some of these ancient secrets.

Known as the Dragon Project, this two-year investigation of megalithic sites will bring orthodox and unorthodox techniques to bear to see whether there really is evidence to substantiate the theories about these sites as focal points for some kind of energy – or whatever else.

'We've already got geologists looking at the coincidence of faults and megalithic sites,' says Paul Devereux. In addition, they are going to be subjected to the scrutiny of surveyors; horizons will be studied for topological oddities; inorganic chemists will analyse the stones that constitute stone monuments; gauss meters will be used to scan the force fields around the stones and electro-photography will be used to find what that can reveal about energy patterns.

Scientific analysis is an important, but not the only, means of investigating megalithic sites. The Dragon Project is also making use of dowisers and psychics to tune into their secrets.

The work has already begun on

a site near Oxford and other locations will be subjected to the same intensive study later.

While this investigation is just getting under way, other work on ley lines is coming to fruition. One way of deciding the question of whether sites are or are not intentionally aligned, is to subject them to statistical analysis using computers. It's a long job, because each alignment has to be tested individually. But Robert Forest, using the strip alignment formula developed by Cambridge statistician Michael Behrend, showed that a Yorkshire ley line, linking three sites, was a substantially above chance, intentional alignment. Others are being investigated.

Devereux, who, in his interpretation of the evidence, is cautious, rather than optimistically over-enthusiastic, believes that this clinches the ley-line case. Even if the alignment case is proved, it's only the beginning: the what and why of ley lines will still have to be untangled. 'You've got straight lines in Bolivia, Peru, Britain and elsewhere, an intentional system of alignment. But no one has left any record as to what they are and why they were made.' Perhaps we'll know more as a result of the Dragon Project.

Meanwhile, watch out for Paul's new book, *The Ley Hunter's Companion – ancient aligned sites, a new study with field guides and maps*, which is being published by Thames & Hudson this summer.

Psychic detectives

WILL psychics be able to help police solve the mysterious disappearance of 13-year-old Genette Tate? Newspapers have already reported a number of false leads given by people who claim to have had psychic information about the whereabouts of the Aylesbeare, Devon, newspaper delivery girl who disappeared on Saturday 19 August 1978.

The police have followed them all up patiently. In fact, according to the *Sunday Express* (1 October 1978), the police 'have dealt with over 200 mediums and people interested in psychic detection'.

In order to bring some order to this deluge of psychic help a television scriptwriter, Andrew Wilson, led a research group of psychics in a special week-long phone-in in December.

As a result, 200 people searched an East Devon plantation in pouring rain on 10 December searching for clues.



John Alderson, Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall (centre) leads a public search for Genette Tate last August.

The site is about a mile from the village of Aylesbeare and it had been chosen, according to a *Daily Telegraph* report, because people had reported 'good vibrations' as they passed it.

Mr Wilson told the newspaper: 'We have also had an indication from one major European clairvoyant who is seldom wrong and one British clairvoyant.' A Bexleyheath clairvoyant, Mrs Nella Jones, had told them to look for a piece of cloth, and indeed all that was found was a strip of blue cloth which was sent away for examination.

Although the police have searched the plantation twice before they co-operated with the psychic-inspired hunt.

The Genette Tate case has also inspired another unorthodox attempt to discover clues. The BBC TV *Tonight* programme arranged for a mother and her teenage daughter to undergo hypnosis in the hope that they could recall vital information about what they saw in Aylesbeare on the afternoon in question. They were near the spot at the time Genette disappeared.

TV viewers saw Mrs Matilda Rogers, a policeman's wife, and her daughter Gail describe a car that had passed them in the lane near where Genette's bicycle was found abandoned. They were able to describe the man at the wheel in sufficient detail for an Identikit picture to be made. And they also supplied some of the letters and numbers on the car's number plate, and described it well enough for the police to determine its make.

Although hypnosis is used extensively by police in the USA, it is not accepted practice in Britain. It is thought to have been used in only two other cases in this country.

Sadly, the hypnotic session –

like the psychic 'clues' – has so far yielded no positive results and Genette's disappearance remains unsolved.

Pictures of the soul?

SEMYON Davidovich Kirlian, the Russian who discovered the method of high-frequency photography which is named after him, has died. His death, in August last year, was first reported in England by Dr Douglas Dean at the Parascience Conference during the same month.

Kirlian photography, as it is known, has excited much interest and controversy in the psychic field. When news of it first leaked out of Russia in the 60s, there were extravagant claims that the Soviets had succeeded in photographing the soul. Subsequent research has shown that the colourful corona surrounding living organisms which is depicted on Kirlian pictures may be no more than an electrical phenomenon. But even so, it is still important.

The indications are that, when properly understood and produced under controlled conditions, the Kirlian effect can be used as a very useful diagnostic tool, giving early warning of diseases long before any physical symptoms of ill-health can be detected.

The importance of Kirlian photography to psychic research lies in the belief of a number of leading investigators that the 'aura' which it depicts is influenced by the mind. If so, this physical manifestation of psychological states may well shed light on the mind-body relationship and help us to understand the mechanics of some paranormal events.

Semyon Kirlian made his discovery while working as an electrician in Krasnodar, southern Russia, in 1939. He went to a research institute to pick up a piece of equipment which needed repairing and he happened to see a demonstration of electrotherapy equipment. He noticed a flash of light between the electrodes and the patient's skin and he wondered if it was possible to photograph it, by putting a photographic plate between the two.

He produced equipment and made his first exposure, using his own hand in the machine. He was rewarded with a severe burn and a picture which showed luminescence around the contours of his hand. Later, he was to discover that this effect had been noted by others before him, but none had gone on to make an extensive study of it.

Kirlian did so, assisted by his wife Valentina, a teacher and

journalist (who died some years ago), and together they developed and refined their apparatus until they had produced a new method of photography covered by 14 patents. Eventually, as well as producing still photographs, they were able to make coloured movies.

This is how American writers Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder describe what Kirlian saw through his instrument, in their book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (1970):

'The hand itself looked like the Milky Way in a starry sky. Against a background of blue and gold, something was taking place in the hand that looked like a fireworks display. Multi-coloured flares lit up, then sparks, twinkles, flashes. Some lights glowed steadily like Roman candles, others flashed out then dimmed. Still others sparkled at intervals. In parts of his hand there was little dim clouds. Certain glittering flares meandered along sparkling labyrinths like spaceships travelling to other galaxies.'

But what really excited psychic interest, both behind the Iron Curtain and in the West, was the discovery of the 'phantom leaf' effect. It was found that if part of a leaf was cut away and the leaf was then placed in a Kirlian device and photographed, on occasion a picture of the whole leaf was reproduced.

This suggests that living organisms have an energy body which is quite distinct from the physical, so that when the latter is mutilated in some way its 'auric blueprint' is unaffected.

And if it happens to plants then perhaps it happens to human beings too: which brings us back to the early idea that the Kirlians were, after all, photographing the soul.

Clearly, a lot more work has to be done before we can be certain what the Kirlian effect is. But it is interesting to read again the words which Kirlian wrote in May 1972 to Stanley Krippner, PhD, director of the Dream Laboratory at New York's Maimonides Medical Centre. It was a letter to mark the first international conference on Kirlian photography, in the USA:

'Research with varied types of objects by means of studies of their "electrical conditions" - called by the Soviet scientists "the Kirlian effect" - apparently will have such enormous significance that an impartial assessment of the methods will be carried out only by minds in succeeding generations. The possibilities are immense; indeed, they are practically inexhaustible.'

Kirlian was made a Hero of the Soviet Union in 1964.

Challenge for researchers

DESPITE the controversy which surrounded their first visit to England in June last year, two psychic surgeons are planning to return very shortly.

David and Helen Elizalde are reputed to have the ability to open human bodies with their bare hands, delve inside to remove diseased matter and growths, then close the wound again without leaving a scar. They use no surgical instruments or anaesthetics, nor do they take any special precautions to prevent infection.

Their first visit was virtually under exclusive contract to the Spiritualists' National Union which arranged for people needing treatment to see the Elizaldes at its headquarters, Stansted Hall, Essex. Glowing tributes have appeared in the Spiritualist press, mostly from SNU officials who had treatment, but it is known that not everyone benefited from the psychic surgery.

A home movie of the Elizaldes at work was shown on BBC TV some weeks later and arch-sceptic James Randi, a conjurer, showed that at one point in the film, when Helen's fingers appeared to be plunging into an abdomen they were really curled up out of sight. Randi also gave an impressive demonstration of 'psychic surgery' using sleight-of-hand.

Because a conjurer can duplicate a phenomenon under his own conditions does not mean that the original event is not genuine, but it does reinforce the view that such demonstrations need to be monitored very closely.

The Elizaldes will be back at Stansted from 28 April-12 May and again from 19-26 May. It is imperative this time that all 'psychic operations' that they perform are witnessed by medically qualified people who can examine patients before and after their treatment. It would also be

valuable to have a conjurer present to ensure that no trickery is used to produce the results.

Reports of psychic surgery have astonished the world for many years now but little has been done to provide convincing evidence for its reality. The SNU has a golden opportunity to make a name for itself and conduct a sensible, scientific study of this phenomenon at first hand, perhaps in co-operation with qualified researchers.

We hope it does not shirk it.

Premonitions bureau

Alpha is forming a premonitions bureau which will collect, collate and report on forewarnings of coming events. We invite people who have dreams, intuitions and psychic communications which are sufficiently detailed to be verifiable after the event to notify us immediately.

There are several premonitions bureaux in existence doing much the same work and we hope to work in co-operation with them. A British Premonitions Bureau was set up after the Aberfan disaster (see feature on Page 25) and functioned very successfully under the guidance of Peter Fairley and the London *Evening Standard*. But that bureau has not been active for about two years.

It seemed to us that a premonitions bureau was more likely to succeed if it was run by a publication working in the field, and so we have established the bureau on a trial basis for a year.

A prime purpose, of course, is to monitor the forecasts as they are received in the hope that they might provide an early warning of impending disasters which can be avoided. But the information we receive will also be analysed to see if a nationwide survey of this kind can provide us with any clues about the mechanisms of premonitions, as well as hard evidence for their reality.

If you have a premonition, or you know someone else who has,

then please send a detailed account giving as much information about when and where you had the experience, and what you expect to happen. If, at a later date, you believe your premonition has been fulfilled, please also notify us. A stamped addressed envelope would be appreciated if you would like an acknowledgement.

Unless otherwise stated, it will be assumed that you have no objection to the information you supply being passed to investigators for further study.

Full results of our experiment will be published at the end of the first year, but any noteworthy premonitions that occur in the meantime will appear in our columns.

You should send your report to: Alpha Premonitions Bureau, 20 Regent Street, Fleet, Hants GU13 9NR.

Echoes of the past

CAN past events live on? It may sound preposterous but many psychics and investigators claim, for example, that an object - when held by a sensitive person - can give information about its owner and its past. It is suggested, too, that ghosts may be another manifestation of the same phenomenon: that they are not real but are a past event which can be seen by psychic individuals coming into contact with a certain spot.

Sceptics, of course, offer other suggestions, but recent disclosures by the American Navy may give us a new insight into such happenings. It has been revealed that a super-sensitive and secret hydrophone network, which tracks Soviet submarines, has been picking up inexplicable noises which may be the echoes of events over 25 years ago.

Since the launch of the network - called Sosus - in 1952 hundreds of hydrophones have been placed on ocean floors, and the system is said to be capable of detecting a submarine 3000 miles away, and possibly even 10000 miles away. But it also picks up strange noises and explosions in the Atlantic which, according to a *US News and World Report* story, could be echoes of the Second World War.

It is suggested that natural sound channels deep in the ocean floors act like telephone cables. One expert explained: 'Sound waves seem to be able to travel along them almost without deterioration in the signal. The sound goes back and forth losing hardly any of its strength. If these mysterious sounds Sosus is hearing aren't World War Two noises, then the experts don't know how to account for them.'

New study of Borley Rectory



Photo: Peter Underwood

TRINITY College, Cambridge, has given a £300 award to the Canadian New Horizons Research Foundation for an investigation of the history of Borley Rectory, Suffolk. Once described as the most haunted house in Britain, it was built in 1863 by the Rev H. D. E. Bull. Fire destroyed it in February 1939 and the ruin was demolished in 1944. Some researchers claim that the strange phenomena have now transferred themselves to Borley Church.

Picking up voices from the past

Margo Williams receives messages every day from people she does not know. Some of them have been dead for centuries. Her remarkable powers are being investigated by leading researchers. She and her husband talk to Alpha.



Margo Williams takes dictation from a disembodied voice.

IT WAS a bright Spring morning in April 1976 and Margo Williams was busy in the kitchen of her modest terraced home, tucked away in a cul-de-sac off one of the main roads at Ventnor, Isle of Wight. She was not expecting visitors so she was startled to hear a woman's voice say, 'My name is Jane'. She swung round to see who it was.

'There was nobody there', Margo recalls, 'but I suddenly had this urge to write. I don't know why I wrote, why I had to write, but I had to. I think she said her name a second time, and then I wrote what she said. She was very, very quick and I started writing furiously.'

When the voice finished speaking it left Margo bewildered. Not knowing what to make of it she showed it to her husband, Wally, whose mild response was, 'Well, it's a bit strange isn't it? Let's see what happens.'

What happened was that Margo continued hearing voices. Jane spoke to her again two days later and then on a further 73 occasions (the longest series of communications Margo has received) and she has been joined by over 100 other people who have told their stories

to the Isle of Wight housewife. The average number of scripts per person is from six to eight, and when *Alpha* went to see the couple at their Ventnor home, the score was 1380 scripts representing 133 different case histories. But the total changes regularly for Margo receives these unseen 'drop-in' communicators on average twice a day.

'We've had people from all walks of life', Wally explains. 'Men and women, from humble servants to the top brass of the world in different forms. There have been civilians, military, clergy, doctors – you name it, we've had it, in an ever-increasing variety. At first it was very much a Victorian thing but the time zone has extended and we have even heard from a woman called Margaret who died just after AD 1500.'

Once the unsought messages became a regular feature of Margo's daily routine Wally set about trying to check if the voices his wife was hearing were real or imaginary. Wally, a one-time chemical engineer, became semi-retired a few years ago so he has the time to do the detailed research that is necessary to evaluate the material.

The first communicator, Jane, gave only brief information about herself although her story was long and fascinating. 'She was a Devon housewife, living in the mid-Victorian period, and her story was interesting but not very startling', says Wally. 'For a long time we weren't sure if it was just something pouring out of Margo's subconscious. The first real breakthrough came when Jane said her family doctor's name was MacKenzie. At the same time there were enough clues in her other material to know that she lived somewhere in Devon, near the sea, a town and some cliffs. I wrote to the Wellcome Medical History Library and asked if they had a list of Dr Mackenzies working in England in the 1860–1870 period. It turned out that there were only six and one of them was in Sidmouth, Devon, which fitted the facts perfectly.'

Though this was not conclusive proof it encouraged Wally to continue researching the scripts. He now spends most evenings writing away to specialist libraries and institutions asking if they have records which will help him identify the communicators, while Margo watches her favourite comedy programmes on television. Wally usually says, quite truthfully, that he is doing historical research because he discovered at an early stage that any reference to mediumship and messages from the dead often resulted in 'a wall of silence'.

Wally is the ideal person to research his wife's scripts. With a scientific background and a meticulous eye for detail, he sifts through the messages looking for clues, then logs all the information and files the correspondence so that, at the mention of any one of the scripts, he can quickly find it and discuss when it was written and what corroboration has been produced.

The problem for Wally is that, to use his own words, the communicators 'are rather coy about giving their names'. Just occasionally a voice will begin by giving a christian name and surname, but more often than not Wally has to put the various pieces of the 'jigsaw' together, drawn from various scripts, to get a complete picture. Fortunately, Margo is able to recognise each communicator by the difference in the voice.

'I do wonder why they don't give their full names and addresses, but usually I

manage to get some name out of them', Margo says. 'In fact, I think there was only one who never gave a name at all.' Margo tries to elicit more information by questioning the communicators mentally. She never gets a direct response but occasionally the information she asks for crops up in a later script.

'They seem to *intend* that we should have a job to identify them and do some research on them before we know who they are', Wally adds. 'If they gave full names and addresses someone might suspect that Margo is producing them from a file.'

'Our local library does not have the

death coming through many people now that it would be foolish not to take it seriously. I know there are those who say it must be cryptomnesia (subconscious memory of information that has been forgotten by the conscious mind), but having lived with Margo so closely for most of my life I know that she's not competent to write the stuff and, even if she'd read the basic facts, someone's got to do an awful lot of script-writing which is beyond her.

'In any case, most of the type of people she hears speaking are not the sort of people who would appear in the type of books she reads. They're very serious

the contents of the scripts. The strange thing about the communications is that the people who 'come back' appear at first to be a random selection of individuals from different historical periods and there seems to be no reason for their spirit return. But examination of the scripts reveals a pattern that is gradually evolving.

'The messages started off with evidence for survival of death and the book contains material of that type', says Wally. 'But it has progressed to other levels, because some communicators have begun telling us about previous lives. It is usually just one or two incarnations that they can remember and be reasonably precise about; after that they say the mist gets thicker and they can't see anything clearly. But one woman told us what she had been in nine lives.'

'In addition to the reincarnation material we have a third category of message - containing warnings to the world. About 20 different communicators now have spoken about the danger to the world in 1998. It seems to be pointing to a world war in that year and some of the warnings are from people whose identities we have been able to confirm.'

'It's quite frightening', Margo adds. 'But it seems that it isn't inevitable. The world has a choice. We have been told that we must choose our leaders wisely.'

'It seems to me there's an evolving pattern in Margo's mediumship', says Wally, 'and we don't know how near to the end we are yet'.

Where Margo differs from most other mediums is that she does not give sittings to people because she cannot pick up messages from dead relatives. She does not know, from one day to the next, who will be visiting her from the next world, nor does she know who or what it is that chooses which individual should be allowed to talk over the spiritual telephone to the former London telephonist.

'It's like taking dictation', she explains. 'I hear a voice and I write down what I hear, so it isn't really automatic writing. But my hand moves very rapidly - much faster than I write normally - spelling out words correctly that I don't know how to spell . . . even foreign words occasionally. And though I know the handwriting is not theirs, it isn't mine either. It varies from one communicator to another, but more in the way it is done than in the style. It's terribly hard to imagine how it takes place. I can only report what happens.'

In the middle of last year Margo discovered a fascinating use for her remarkable talent - helping release earthbound spirits. She discovered that within half-an-hour of visiting a haunted house she would hear the voice of the troubled spirit, and often, by writing down the ghost's confession, she could help it progress to the next world.

The story of how this ability was discovered and put to good use for the ghost of Appuldurcombe House will be told in the next issue of *Alpha*. α



Margo Williams receives the messages, Walter checks them.

sort of reference books we need to check out many of the messages, but it does have *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. So, once I have a name to work on, the first thing I do is see if the person is listed there. Failing that, it's really a case of deciding which specialist library is most likely to have the information. If it's a doctor then the Wellcome Medical History Library will be able to help. With clergymen we've been helped very much by Canterbury Cathedral's archivist. For anyone connected with London we get in touch with the Greater London History Library at Westminster, which is very good.

'We had a coal miner once, so I wrote to the Coal Board Library and they were very helpful. We have contacted the Portsmouth Naval History section and Greenwich Naval College for Royal Naval personnel and Sandhurst for the Army. It's really surprising the wealth of information that is available if you can just work out in your mind where to go.'

Before these unseen visitors began 'dropping in' on them, Margo and Wally Williams were not particularly religious. 'I don't know that I believed in anything', says Margo. As for the effect the scripts have had on her life, she adds this masterly understatement, 'Well, they've made me think much more'.

Wally goes further by expressing not only his own thoughts but those of many other people who have pondered on the implications of Margo's remarkable mediumship:

'There's so much evidence for life after

people who write very serious stuff. So, having eliminated a deliberate hoax, because I know that we're not hoaxing, and having eliminated cryptomnesia because that's just not on with the names and facts we've got, one just has to take it seriously and say, what else can it be but a genuine spiritual happening?'

The world will be able to judge when a book about Margo Williams, *The Moving Hand Writes*, is published on 26 April this year. It will contain the first 36 case histories, together with Margo and Wally's story and an evaluation of the scripts. The book will, undoubtedly, cause a parapsychological sensation because, for many years, psychic research has been drawing away from the subject of life after death (which preoccupied the pioneer researchers) and concerning itself more with statistical evidence for psychic powers produced in laboratory tests. The Margo Williams scripts bring the after-life sharply back into focus.

Her talent has attracted the attention of one of Britain's top parapsychologists, Dr John Beloff, who spent a day on the Isle of Wight with the Williamses, examining the evidence they have amassed. He has also been instrumental in verifying some of the facts contained in a series of scripts and has given Margo an impressive testimony.

But for those psychological researchers who accept that it is a genuine paranormal phenomenon of unknown origin, or even that the spirits of the dead are responsible, there is a stumbling block:

The pilot who never came back . . .

The televised UFO sighting over New Zealand has puzzled the world. But even stranger is the case of Frederick Valentich, a young Australian pilot who encountered a UFO in October and then vanished without trace.

IT'S NOT an aircraft . . . These were the last tantalising words a young pilot was to utter before radio and all other contact was lost and he disappeared without trace.

What should have been no more than a routine, early evening flight between Melbourne and nearby King Island, Bass Strait, has turned into one of Australian aviation's most puzzling mysteries.

The story ran a short, but dramatic, course.

At 6.19 pm on Saturday, 21 October 1978, a single-engined Cessna 182 light aircraft took off from Moorabbin Airport, outside Melbourne, bound for King Island on a clear, balmy evening. The pilot was 20-year old Frederick Valentich who, though young, had already clocked up more than 150 hours flying. Fifty-four minutes later, the aircraft had apparently vanished out of the air and off the face of the earth. What made the incident particularly significant was that radio contact was maintained during the six minutes prior to his disappearance, a transcript of which appears on Page 8.

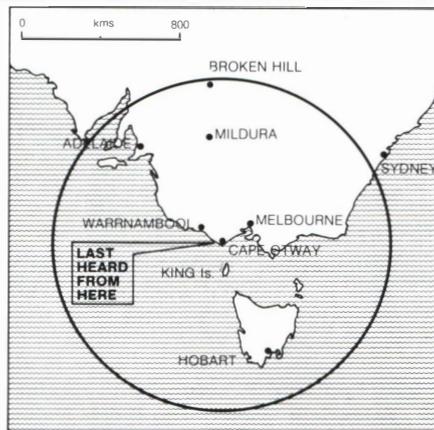
His six-minute communication, and a strange, inexplicable metallic sound with which his transmission ended, are the only remaining clues to his disappearance. At first there were suspicions that he had staged the whole episode. But this has been dismissed. If it was a hoax, he has still to turn up, months later. He could have crashed in the sea. Yet despite a search of the area and the discovery of some oil, which turned out to be of a non-aircraft type, no wreckage was found. So his fate remains a matter for speculation.

What could have happened to Valentich?

Needless to say, the Australian papers pounced on the story and followed all the leads, some of which suggested a mundane, if tragic, explanation for the disaster.

Frederick Valentich was an assistant store manager with a passion for flying. He flew with a flying club and was on his way to qualifying for his commercial pilot's licence.

That Saturday, having worked earlier in the day and attended a three-hour meteorological lecture, he had arranged to fly to King Island to pick up some crayfish and return straight to Moorab-



The area in which the Cessna reported a UFO.

bin airport. His main motive was, apparently, to notch up some night-flying hours that would count towards his pilot's licence. It was to be his first taste of night flying.

Experienced aviators who commented on the incident pointed out that disorientation while flying over the sea at night was a known danger. The greatest risk of this happening was during the switch from visual flight to instruments at dusk, the time when Valentich took off to make his fateful flight.

As it was his first experience of night flying, so this argument ran, he could have suffered disorientation as a result of the confusing light conditions. Apparently, it's not unknown for pilots to suffer from the misapprehension that they are flying upside down. If this had happened, perhaps Valentich could have tried to correct the position of his plane and actually turned himself upside down in the process. The lights he then saw and misinterpreted could have been his own aircraft's reflected by the sea.

Well, it is not a very cogent theory. It might have been Valentich's first night flight, but he was already familiar with aerobatic flying. What's more, the manufacturers of his plane point out that the Cessna 182 is only capable of flying upside down for up to a minute at a time before the gravity fuel system would have cut out. The radio transmission indicates the sightings – or hallucinations – lasted six minutes.

Was the mystery craft an unknown aircraft? Again, the air traffic controllers

gave Valentich a negative answer to his enquiry as to whether there were any other aircraft, either civilian or military, in the vicinity. He also had difficulty in identifying the craft, but as a pilot he could have been expected to have had a fairly sound knowledge of aircraft types.

With all that it may, or may not, imply, it does seem that Valentich had an encounter with an unidentified flying object that was not, as far as the available evidence of air traffic control and his description, of known terrestrial origin.

What Melbourne Flight Information Service could coax out of Valentich hardly amounted to a definitive description, but it did highlight several specific points.

The craft was 'a long shape . . .' had 'four bright, it seems to me, like landing lights', it was travelling at 'speeds I cannot identify'. Later, when the craft was directly above his Cessna, he said that it had 'a green light and a sort of metallic light. It's all shiny on the outside.' It's worth noting that at no time did he resort to the loaded phrase 'UFO' in his radio contact with air traffic control, although this is clearly what is implied by his description.

If he was suffering from a hallucination, or being fooled by reflections of his own lights on his cockpit windscreen, then the description could not expect to be corroborated. But according to a report from bank manager Col Morgan, there does seem to be at least one independent witness of a craft that could have been the one Valentich saw.

Melbourne's *Sun* carried the story on the 24 October, a few days after the disappearance. Mr Morgan and his wife were driving along the Melbourne-Geelong road on Saturday night, when they saw what they described as a hovering craft. The time was a few minutes after 7 pm. They noticed that the craft was slow moving while they were watching it, with green, flickering lights at one end. Mr Morgan and his wife realised, when they heard of Valentich's disappearance, that their sighting could have some connection with the incident.

As for the actual disappearance of Valentich, official sources have been unable to offer any theory that satisfactorily explains the incident. The Federal Department of Transport investigated the case and, amongst other things,

looked into the pilot's background.

One thing that did come out was that he was fascinated by UFOs and had collected books and magazines on the subject. Ironically, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was, according to his family, probably the last film he saw.

If the real-life Saturday night sighting was a UFO, it was not the first Valentich had seen. According to a report published in the *Sunday Press*, 29 October, his mother claimed that she and her son had seen a UFO hovering above their home in June 1977.

'It was a very bright object, like a star, but ten to 20 times bigger. For ten minutes it did not move. Then suddenly it streaked away in a flash. We were both convinced it was a UFO.'

On another occasion, Valentich had told both his parents that he has seen classified information at Sale RAAF base, during his period with the Air Training Corps, which had further strengthened his belief in their existence.

The same weekend he disappeared, the *Sun* claimed to have received many calls from people in and around Melbourne who said they had seen UFOs.

Bass Strait has been the scene of many previous sightings. From early December 1977 through until January 1978, there had been a series, according to the *Sunday Observer*. The paper reports that sightings of a bright white light hovering off Cape Otway Lighthouse had been made by 'holiday makers, fishermen, school teachers, local police.'

'The first sighting was made by a group of school teachers holidaying at Lorne. They telephoned the lighthouse keeper at Cape Otway reporting a bright light hovering about 20 miles out on Bass Strait.

The keeper confirmed the sighting.

'Later the crew of the fishing boat Random Harvest reported being buzzed by a "giant white light, just like a huge headlight", and an Apollo Bay resident claimed he had found large areas of flattened grass shortly after sighting a group of UFOs.'

Accounts go back much further than this, though. As long ago as 1896, hundreds of people reported seeing 'cigar shaped' objects flying over the Strait, says the *Sunday Observer*.

Since 1969, three other light aircraft have vanished without trace of pilot or plane in the vicinity of Cape Otway. Whatever happened to them all, we may never know. But unlike the others, Valentich left, in his last transmission, a record which poses more questions than anyone has yet been able to answer satisfactorily.

As Valentich left the store where he worked that October Saturday, Dick Williams, the store manager, had no difficulty recalling what he said, as he was later to tell the *Sunday Press*. 'I'll never forget his last words as he walked outside. He looked up at the clear blue sky and said "It's going to be a nice day to go flying." 'α

Last words of pilot Valentich

The following is the complete transcript of the last communications between Delta Sierra Juliet and the Melbourne Flight Information Service at Tullamarine.

7.06 pm

Tullamarine: 'Melbourne this is Delta Sierra Juliet. Is there any known traffic below five thousand feet?'

Tullamarine: 'No known traffic.'

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. I am . . . seems to be large aircraft below five thousand.'

7.06 pm and 44 seconds:

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet, what type of aircraft is it?'

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. I cannot confirm. It has four bright, it seems to me, like landing lights.'

7.07 pm

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.' (This is a normal method of acknowledging the transmission has been received.)

7.07 pm and 31 seconds.

Valentich: 'Melbourne this is Delta Sierra Juliet. The aircraft just passed over me at least a thousand feet above.'

Tullamarine: Roger. And it is a large aircraft, confirmed?'

Valentich: 'Unknown due to speed it's travelling. Is there any Air Force aircraft in the vicinity?'

Tullamarine: Delta Sierra Juliet, no known aircraft in vicinity.'

7.08 pm and 18 seconds.

Valentich: 'Melbourne it's approaching now from due East towards me.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.'

7.08 pm and 41 seconds.

(Open microphone for two seconds)

7.08 pm and 48 seconds

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. It seems to me that it's flying over me two to three times at speeds I cannot identify.'

7.09 pm

Tullamarine: 'Roger. What is your actual level?'

Valentich: 'My level is four and a half thousand. Four, five, zero, zero.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet, and you confirm you cannot identify aircraft?'

Valentich: Affirmative.'

Tullamarine: 'Roger. Standby.'

7.09 pm and 27 seconds.

Valentich: 'Melbourne, Delta Sierra Juliet. It's not an aircraft. It's . . .' (open mike for two seconds).

7.09 pm and 42 seconds.

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne. Can you describe aircraft?'

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. As it's flying past it's a long shape (open mike for three seconds). Cannot identify more than that. It has such speed . . . (open mike for three seconds). Before me right now, Melbourne.'

7.10 pm

Tullamarine: 'Roger, and how large would object be?'

7.10 pm and 19 seconds.

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. Melbourne. Seems like it's stationary. What I'm doing right now is orbiting and the thing is just orbiting on top of me also. It's got a green light and a sort of metallic light. It's all shiny on the outside.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.'

7.10 pm and 46 seconds.

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.' (Open mike for five seconds) 'It's just vanished.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.'

7.11 pm

Valentich: 'Melbourne would you know what type of aircraft I've got? Is it a military aircraft?'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet, confirm aircraft just vanished.'

Valentich: 'Say again?'

Tullamarine: 'Is aircraft still with you?'

Valentich: 'It's . . . (open mike for two seconds) now approaching from southwest.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet.'

7.11 pm and 50 seconds.

Valentich: 'Delta Sierra Juliet. The engine is rough idling. I've got it set at twenty-three, twenty-four (presumably meaning between 2300 and 2400 rpm) and the thing is coughing.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet, Roger. What are your intentions?'

Valentich: 'My intentions are to continue on to King Island. Melbourne, that strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again. It . . . (open mike for two seconds) is hovering and it's not an aircraft.'

Tullamarine: 'Delta Sierra Juliet'

7.12 pm and 28 seconds:

'Delta Sierra Juliet, Melbourne . . .' (Open mike for 17 seconds during which was heard a loud metallic sound.)

That was the last transmission received from Frederick Valentich in Delta Sierra Juliet.

EXTRAORDINARY POWERS

Why Mr Spriggs caused chaos in Cardiff

Throughout history there have been reports of people who are said to possess extraordinary powers. In this, the first of a series, we tell the story of a remarkable Welshman who was performing these wonders exactly a century ago.

GEORGE Spriggs, a young Cardiff boot and shoe repairer, could produce phantoms. What makes his spirit materialisations so different from many that are reputed to appear in seance rooms is that, having been formed, they would walk about the house and even visit the shop next door to purchase things.

It sounds preposterous. Spriggs, the sceptics would argue, must have been masquerading as a spirit or getting confederates to do so. But the facts cannot be so easily dismissed. The many reputable witnesses who saw Spriggs producing phantoms were sure that no trickery was possible.

They measured the various spirits who appeared and found they differed greatly from the medium's height. They weighed them, too. Their weights varied, but none was as heavy as the medium. Besides, Spriggs was placed on a chair in a corner of a room, behind a curtain. The floor was solid and the door was behind the sitters, so no accomplices could gain access.

Spriggs was 'discovered' by a medium, Rees Lewis, who lived across the road from the young cobbler. Lewis was able to persuade Spriggs to leave a narrow religious sect to which he belonged and join the Circle of Light, a Spiritualist group. After ten months of receiving automatic writing and clairvoyance, physical phenomena began to occur and it culminated in the production of people who, though they appeared to be as normal as living beings, were in fact spirits of the dead.

The earliest records of this remarkable Cardiff group are for the period 1877-79 and one of the regular sitters at that time was A. J. Smart. This is his testimony to what occurred:

'I have seen, in the course of one evening, ten or a dozen separate forms, male and female, manifest; some the height of a child, about four feet, others nearer six feet; all of different build, contour and manner, and sometimes appearing in very rapid succession. I have seen two of these, of different stature, at the same moment. I have seen the medium side by side with one of them.'

A Spiritualist publication, *The Medium*, published a signed account on 21 December 1877, from 16 witnesses who saw the medium and a spirit at the same time. Further evidence that the phantoms were not produced by trickery comes in this testimony from Smart:

'I have seen a form nearly six feet in height gradually dematerialise, dissolving until only a small white cloud remained in the place where he stood, from which he has slowly reappeared again to his full height. . . . I have seen one form leave the seance room, and quite a different one return. I have seen them of other nationalities, with black features and hands. One friend would sit down with us or stand conversing for some 20 minutes.'

On one occasion a tall Negro is said to have appeared, walked into the bedroom of Spriggs' sleeping grandson and then carried the child into the garden and back again. The man who helped Spriggs develop his powers described some of his experiences in these words:

'For upwards of two years spirit friends have shown themselves visibly, times out of number, and in the broad gaslight, clothed in white garments. They have, likewise, dissolved gradually and slowly before us, until only a small white cloud had been left in the place where they stood. They have, visibly, walked into every room in the house. On summer evenings they have walked in

the garden, in the presence of a dozen visitors.'

The seances were held in Rees Lewis's home and the wandering spirits were too much for one of his neighbours who complained they frightened his children and sought a court injunction against the seances. His plea was dismissed.

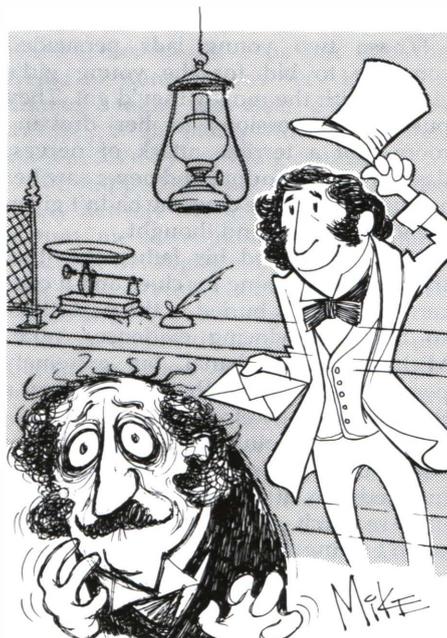
In November 1880 Spriggs left Wales and went to live in Melbourne, Australia, where he continued to produce phantoms. One of the witnesses to his Australian seances was W. Donovan, a former member of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria. This prominent man attended sessions with Spriggs for 18 months and subsequently wrote a book, *The Evidences of Spiritualism*, which contains a detailed account of Spriggs' mediumship.

An extraordinary incident occurred at one of the Australian seances. A man materialised and said he wanted to write a letter. The materials were provided and he wrote a three-page letter which he put in an envelope and addressed to a woman in Sydney who had been to the circle two or three times. No one had a stamp, however, so he borrowed sixpence from one of the sitters and left the seance room in order to buy one from the shop next door.

Word reached the shopkeeper that a phantom was on its way to buy a stamp and he was so flustered that he forgot to give the dead man his change. When he returned to the seance room the spirit realised the shopkeeper's error and went back for the money. The letter was posted and a reply received which the materialised man subsequently opened, at another seance, and read aloud.

The power to produce phantoms faded after six years but Spriggs, who never charged for his seances, continued to produce spirit voices for some time. He also became renowned for his accurate medical diagnoses. In 1900 he returned to Britain and between 1903 and 1905 he used his psychic powers to give free medical advice in the rooms of the London Spiritualist Alliance (now the College for Psychic Studies).

Spriggs died, aged 62, in 1912, bringing to an end one of the most remarkable chapters in the annals of psychic history.



NEXT ISSUE: The extraordinary powers of Etta Wreidt who produced spirit voices out of the air.

The other side of Michael Bentine

From an early age the world of mediums and the paranormal has been a familiar part of this famous comedian's life. In this special interview he talks about his experiences, beliefs, psychic abilities and investigations

MENTION Michael Bentine's name and most people will almost certainly think of the comedian. Depending how far back their memories go, they will associate him with the Goons, his Square World programmes or one of the many children's TV series he has originated. Currently, it's his 'Potty Time' programmes that have the kids glued to the screen, while his frequent stage appearances have kept him in the adult audience's eye.

But behind the jokes and that irresistible toothy grin, there is a serious side that is probably less familiar. For most of his life, the paranormal, in its many forms, has been a special field of study. What's more, he claims to be a psychic himself whose clairvoyant gift has sustained an artistic career with a steady flow of inspiration for sketches, programmes and series.

I went along to his Surrey home to find out more about the other side of Michael Bentine, his experience as a psychic, his work as a researcher and his opinions about what is still very much a controversial subject.

He was keen to clear up one point. 'People keep saying I'm a Spiritualist. But I'm not. I'm just an ardent amateur in pursuit of truth, which is what it's all about. I do claim to have had more experience in this field than most people my age, including some of the most active researchers.'

Despite the seriousness of his interest, the Bentine humour was always just beneath the surface. 'You could say I was born with an ectoplasmic spoon in my mouth,' he quipped.

His upbringing and background were, to say the least, extraordinary. From an early age, the world of mediums and the paranormal were as familiar to him as the solid classroom walls were to other children.

It was his father who set him on the psychic trail. Born in Peru, he was educated in Britain where he became a scientist of some distinction for his work as an aerodynamicist.

From an early age, he had had experiences that made him curious about the paranormal. But it was one specific incident in this country when he was 34 that led him to become a serious investigator with a fascinated eight-year old son Michael firmly in tow.

At this time the Bentines lived in Folkestone, Kent. Someone who knew about Michael's father's interest in the subject persuaded him to attend a seance with a medium at Hawkinge, Kent. After she had singled out other people for messages, the medium came to Bentine senior.

It began, unpromisingly, with the name of the town, Bolton. It rang no bells. But the medium persisted. Other pieces of the jig-saw were supplied: a theatre, a young lady, sometime before the first world war . . . The facts still did not seem to add up. Then she said 'This will convince you. Instead of a play going on in the theatre, there's an auction.' The message was from a young woman who said: 'Thank you very much for what you did, she never had a chance to thank you.' 'Now mother was naturally extremely intrigued to know what this woman was so thankful to father for,' says Michael with a chuckle. The full story then came out.

While his father had been a student, he and a friend had fallen for a young actress with a touring company. She had persuaded them to join up as supernumeraries 'stage managers-cum-performers.' At Bolton the tour folded and the manager ran off with the takings. The students cabled to London for some money and the company staged an auction of all the props, scenery and other odds and ends they had.

'These two young lads persuaded someone to bid for the young girl's clothes with the money they'd got. They put her possessions in her dressing room, got a terrible attack of nerves, dashed off to London, and never saw her again.' Since those days, he hadn't given the episode a second thought.

What impressed his father was that there was no fishing for clues and it concerned an event buried in the past. 'Like so much convincing evidence,' notes Michael, 'it was banal, but extremely personal, something that didn't mean a thing to anybody else.'

From that point on, Bentine senior with the aid of his son - 'I became one of his mediums at the age of 13' - plunged into research in a serious way. 'He wasn't trying to convince himself that an area of phenomena existed. He was merely observing it and trying to evaluate it.'

As rivetingly interesting as all this was for young Michael, he remembers that not everyone shared the family's enthusiasm. 'We were very much shunned by the local society. Mother, being more conventional, suffered most from this. Father was really a natural hermit. People who professed to be friends of ours hurriedly turned their faces the other way and said, "Hello, the whole family's lost their marbles".'

'This could be very hurtful at school, especially since I had a perfectly poisonous headmaster who couldn't resist chipping away at me about my father. Up till then, my father had been a highly respected scientist. Now he was "That nut"'. That wasn't very pleasant. But then the whole of research was so fascinating, that this very soon wore off.'

His father adopted a rigorous scientific approach to his investigations. Using his electro- and mechanical-engineering know-how, he built a range of balances, magnetometers and galvanometers to measure any changes in the vicinity of paranormal phenomena. The results weren't always what they expected.

On one occasion, they were getting an impressive flow of mediumistic communications, but the instruments remained disappointingly inert. 'These fantastic pieces of apparatus stood on the table and nothing at all happened to them,' says Michael. 'But the table they were standing on went straight up in the air. Dad turned to me and said, "I think they're trying to tell us something . . ."'

His father's experiments ranged across a wide field: psychometry, clairvoyance, clairaudience, healing, direct voice 'which could be quite alarming', materialisation 'which could be very alarming' and telekinesis 'which could be startling if nothing else'.

Was he ever scared as a youngster? 'Not really. Some of the results could be quite hair-raising but I always felt quite safe because daddy was there. I was more frightened by the war, to be honest.'

It was, in fact, during the war when Michael served in the RAF and later in Intelligence - 'you can see how desperate they were!' - that he had a number of experiences that were decisive for him. 'They weren't mystical, they were essentially warning experiences that were incredibly accurate and saved my life. So



I've got a very good reason to believe in the psychic side of life.'

His personal conviction was reinforced by witnessing many demonstrations, some of which constituted compelling evidence for the authenticity of paranormal powers.

Over the course of their experiments, the Bentines worked with many mediums, 'the phonies, the self-deluded and the gold - the odd genuine medium'.

One of those whom they found most extraordinary was Mrs Balmer, a transfiguration medium whose face would take on the features of the communicating spirit. On a summer's afternoon, a group of friends and acquaintances of Michael's father were invited round to witness her performance. 'I saw her transfigure in broad daylight, so did the other observers - I've never seen it since.' The event was photographed by three separate cameras. 'The first and last shots showed her sitting on a chair, but all the rest were fogged.' Could it have been fraud? 'She didn't have the kind of personality that could induce mass hypnosis. If she was a fraud, why wasn't she doing it at the Albert Hall where she could have packed them in instead of coming to Folkestone for three guineas for the weekend?'

Others whom he found convincing were automatic writing mediums. 'A little local lady wrote in three languages - I'm sure she couldn't have acquired those accomplishments normally. Another medium, who was a pot man in

a London bar, came through as a German professor in abstruse mathematics, some of which were not even proven until 20 years later . . . with that kind of evidence, one is inclined to be a lot more receptive.'

Eddie Partridge from Dover, 'a lovable little man', was a local medium whom the Bentines got to know well. He recalls a remarkable episode involving him that has stuck in his mind, which he believes illustrates the existence of the hidden depths of consciousness into which some people can reach to perform the most extraordinary feats.

'I was 18 at the time. Eddie Partridge asked father to drive us out into the Weald of Kent. It was very late on a summer's night, very clear, a few clouds and very bright moon which was sometimes hidden by scudding clouds.

'We stopped, got out and walked into a very densely overgrown wood, Eddie at front, me in the middle, father behind - without the slightest hesitation or tripping over anything although the place was so tangled and overgrown.

'It was one of those perfect late summer nights when you get absolute stillness in the air. There was just the faint buzz of a town in the distance. There wasn't a sound in the wood, nothing.

'We came to a clearing and the moon came out from behind the clouds and it was clearly lit. I remember Eddie turning to me and smiling and then he made a sound half way between a whistle and a cry and a word - I can't define it other than it was an extraordinary sound.

Every creature in that wood answered him, whether it flew, crawled, cricked, or barked . . . they all answered. Somehow, here was a man who had the secret of total communication with nature.'

Not long after, Michael was to experience the complete reverse of this - 'the total stillness of negation of nature at Belsen - I didn't go there voluntarily, I was there for its liberation.'

The sequel to the Belsen experience happened about eight years ago when Michael went back to Germany to do some shows for the forces and met an army padre who had fought in the same battle, as an officer. After the war he had taken holy orders and returned to the Army. 'He told me - and I've no reason to believe he would lie - that nothing lives in that compound, no beasts, nothing . . . there's a psychic wall there.'

So through childhood, adolescence and then the war and into adult life, Michael experienced and saw a host of phenomena which left him in no doubt that there is more to life than four-square materialists allow.

Since his father died in 1963, he has continued to pursue his own investigation of the paranormal. Currently, what interests him particularly is dowsing, and he has worked with several dowsers. Although most well-known as a water-finding technique, dowsing can be used to find out the answers to all manner of things. 'I'm especially interested in teleradaesthesia (map dowsing).

'Dowsing is obviously a faculty in man connected with the survival mechanism

as its generative force: if man hadn't found water where other creatures hadn't discovered it, he would never have survived as a race.'

Inevitably, his research into this and related fields has brought him into touch with many of the leading researchers and psychics, including Uri Geller.

'I know Uri quite well and like him very much indeed. We've had very similar experiences in life. But I'm not a telekinesist, he is. I've seen enough to be convinced. People say,' he adds with a laugh, "'Well, you've been fooled!" I know many of the profession, who are first-class conjurors and illusionists and I know how they do their tricks. I don't know how he does his and if he is a magician, then he's lighted on a rich strain of stage magic that no one else has.'

Aside from meeting and working with researchers, Michael reads extensively and since his roots are in Peru, he naturally picked up the books of Von Daniken, who ransacked archaeological evidence to support his God-was-an-astronaut theory.

'I had the deepest suspicions of Von Daniken from the first book onwards because I happen to be South American and he had pictures of things that I had been interested in for a long time. Some of them just weren't right. One photo he claimed was evocative of a hard-standing for some kind of craft. But it was only a very small object that had been photographed from a certain angle to make it look very large. On the other hand, he didn't come up with anything that Lethbridge hadn't come up with. There is also the insistence that everything must fit the theory. . . .'

For his money, he prefers the approach of Charles Fort, the tireless recorder of inexplicable phenomena who filled books with dry, factual accounts of strange events. What he said was: 'these are all the phenomena, look at them - I can't see what they all mean, you figure it out!'

Whatever the validity of Von Daniken's theories, the issues do not worry Michael as much as the rather more sinister possibility that occult powers are being misused at political and national levels.

In working for British Intelligence, he was aware of the Nazis' involvement in occult practices: 'There was much more to it than was revealed at the Nuremberg trials,' he says. The fact that it was played down so much puzzled him for many years. But, following a conversation with a lawyer who was familiar with the issues, he believes the explanation was that so extensive and bizarre was the Nazi involvement that if it had been fully exposed, there was a strong possibility that they might have got off the hook on the grounds of insanity. And, of course, if insane, they would have been unfit to stand trial.

He fears that the fascination of the occult for people in positions of power is



This photograph of Michael Bentine's father, with the two ghostly extras on the right, was taken by psychic photographer John Myers. Michael's father visited Myers' South London house taking with him his own camera and film which, Michael understands, was developed in his father's presence. Subsequently, relatives from Peru confirmed that the faces resembled deceased members of the family. The photograph is one of the few mementoes of his father's psychic exploits. He destroyed all his papers before his death on the grounds that they contained material that would have been dangerous in the wrong hands. 'He also said it was up to everyone to find out the truth about these matters for themselves,' says Michael.

still very much with us. Russia's interest in psychic affairs is far from innocent: 'The KGB have been in it up to their ears for years,' he points out. 'They have a section that specialises in cults, occult practices and religious movements.'

But it's not just abroad that the danger lies. Michael is convinced that the attraction of the occult for people concerned with power is universal. Politicians are prime examples and he believes that there is reason to suspect involvement among some of our leading political figures.

This aspect of the paranormal - the fact that it is a power house that can be tapped for good, as with healing, or evil, to realise the ambitions of ruthless men - is something that concerns him deeply. He has seen what can happen to individuals who have dabbled in magic and the occult with disastrous personal and psychological consequences. 'A lot of the stuff you can pick up from the bookshelves today is lethal,' he adds.

What of his own psychic abilities? He describes his gift as subjective clairvoyance. It is effectively a source of inspiration that provides him with a flow of images and ideas. 'Once I can divorce myself from my physical surroundings, and my mind is in that free-ranging, creative area of thought that is known to the Qabalists, the pictures come so fast, I really can't remember all of them.' Michael likens this to having imagery flashed upon an inner screen 'with immense clarity and in full colour. . . it's

subjective though. I can't see objectively with my clairvoyance.' He is convinced that this gift has 'helped me to survive as an artist for 32 years.' He also believes that he has the ability to channel energy for healing - something he has been on the receiving end of intermittently throughout life. 'It put an end to my migraines.'

Despite his belief in the reality of many phenomena generally categorised as paranormal, he thinks that some, such as dowsing and healing, could have explanations consistent with the known laws of nature. He is impressed by the recent American research that shows that weak electrical fields influence the regenerative powers of damaged living matter. His father had explored the possibility that extra-low frequency (ELF) radiations in the electro-magnetic spectrum could be involved in the phenomena.

He also believes that ELF could explain cloud dispersal through concentrated thought. To show me what he could do himself, Michael went to the window and looked up into a heavily clouded sky, with just a few windows of blue here and there. 'Not a good day for this,' he said. Anyway, he found the most clearly identifiable cloud in an almost continuous canopy of grey, closed his eyes and had a go. Sure enough, the cloud was breaking up. But was it anyway? 'Come back another day when the conditions are better.' With such talents, I wonder if he's chosen the wrong profession. α

My ghostly top ten

We asked Andrew Green, well known author of books on hauntings, to assess the best evidence for ghosts.

SOME of the most interesting ghost stories are those which never receive wide publicity.

There is a fascinating genuine multi-haunting in a manor house near Eastbourne, the details of which cannot be revealed until the death of one of the current household, and another which affects the Royal family – and I am not referring to Glamis. But there are many well reported cases, too.

The most recent haunting of a council house in Enfield which has been examined by many renowned experts such as John Beloff, Guy Playfair and Anita Gregory, appears to be one of the most extraordinary. It is claimed that practically every type of phenomena 'in the book' has been experienced, ranging from levitation, apports, direct voice and the witnessing of phantoms of the living.

However, even with video and magnetic tape recordings, television and films and reports from a host of independent witnesses, there still remain a number who are unconvinced as to anything paranormal having occurred.

One of the most interesting and intriguing hauntings is that at Bircham Newton in Norfolk where ghosts of two men, one in uniform, were seen in a badminton court and later a mystifying tape recording was made of weird metallic sounds and a human voice in the building when it was empty at night. The court was adapted after the war from a maintenance workshop for the aerodrome which once occupied the site and the sounds associated with such activity can clearly be heard on the recording.

A recent suggestion, to account for the sound, was that the tape was not clean when supplied since the phenomenon has never been repeated. This comment ignores the sighting of the ghosts by several witnesses and some information gained through a 'sensitive'.

As we learn more about the human mind and the results of malfunctions such as temporal lobe epilepsy and migraine and even allergies, it becomes obvious that much is still to be learnt regarding the witnessing of apparitions.

A tale of charm and romance, which I think is genuine, is the ghost of a woman seen in a Police College in Hartley Wintney, Hampshire, the main building of which is claimed to be the site of the legend of the Mistletoe Bough. In contrast is the older and more horrifying story of a smuggler in Happisburgh in Norfolk who used to be seen by so many people that the Parish Council investigated the matter.

The phantom was that of a man in rag-

ged clothes with his head wobbling grotesquely from side to side, for it was attached to his neck by only a thin strip of flesh. The figure was seen to be carrying a bundle which appeared to contain his legs.

Fantastic as it may sound, when an old well was explored by the council members, the remains of a male torso were found. Under one arm was some rotting cloth surrounding the man's decaying legs. According to local belief the victim had suffered from an attack by two fellow smugglers who had nearly cut his head off and then removed his legs before they threw the body into the well.

Castle Rising and Berry Pomeroy Castle are two other sites of unpleasant hauntings, but one of the most potentially interesting cases which seems to be ignored, presumably because of the difficulties involved when dealing with Government departments, is that of an official flat in Admiralty House.

The phantom of a woman has been seen so clearly by the occupants of the flat that she has been identified as Mar-

'... the figure was carrying a bundle which appeared to contain his legs.'

garet Reay who was shot dead by the eccentric Rev. James Hackman in 1779. A member of the present Cabinet saw the apparition as did Harold Macmillan and the late Winston Churchill.

The best haunting experienced in the last ten years, in my opinion, is that which affected a military property in Folkestone.

Originally built in 1840, though probably on the foundations of a much earlier building, the premises involved were at one time named Lord Beechborough House, after the Colonel commanding the regiment that occupied the nearby barracks. The house, which recently burned down, was occasionally used for the training of troops prior to their transfer to Northern Ireland. It stood on its own in an acre of weed-covered garden. A nearby stable block in the same grounds is used by a local farmer for the storage of hay and animal foodstuffs.

Those claiming to have experienced and witnessed phenomena include the daughter of the Colonel commanding the unit in 1975 when I first visited the house, and a full-time member of the housekeeping staff.

The Colonels' daughter, then a secretary for a local Aero Club, stated that a

weird case of psychokinesis had occurred when a large laundry basket had been mysteriously moved from the hallway, up the stairs and on to the top landing when the building was empty. The only key to the property was held by her and remained in her possession 24 hours a day. The basket was located outside the airing cupboard where an army padre, a lieutenant colonel, had hung himself in 1972.

Other witnesses to the visible spontaneous phenomena were two young girls sleeping in a bedroom, who claim that they saw a soldier come through the room and glide out into the corridor. It was on that landing that a tall woman had also been visualised by a 'sensitive' years after two other witnesses had experienced the same 'visitation'.

It could well be that the phantom was that of the girl friend, a resident maid, of the batman who murdered her in another bedroom and then shot himself in 1932. A severe drop in temperature was recorded on a particular spot on the servants' staircase during my investigation, and it might well be that this was the site of the man's suicide.

During my visit with two colleagues, a rather unusual incident occurred on the same landing at a few minutes to midday. When on the landing and approaching the main stairway, we all heard – this was checked – a tinkling sound similar to that of a chandelier and on turning round I saw a 60W lamp bulb on the floor, rocking gently.

On carefully picking it up I found it to be warm and passed it to the nearest companion to me who confirmed the fact. The problem was to discover where it originated from and how it reached the floor without breaking. After several minutes of attempting to rationalise the incident we came to the conclusion that the bulb could have been an 'apport', but an added factor could be that one of the group is a practising 'medium'.

Tape recordings were made in 1974 and 1976 by three researchers and although sounds of a woman's voice were heard in two localities, the recorder failed to register the noise. Temperature drops of up to 15 degrees were, however, recorded during the incident.

Another factual occurrence which was perhaps relevant to the 'haunting' was that in 1913 a young lieutenant shot himself in the hallway at the precise spot from which the laundry basket was transported some 60 years later.

Three suicides and a murder should be enough to create an 'atmosphere', if not the most convincing ghost story yet. α

Dr Lang – spirit surgeon

Dr Lang died in 1937. But he continues to cure people of a wide range of illnesses. Today, he works through the mediumship of George Chapman. Lang's family, as well as his fellow medical practitioners, have vouched for the spirit doctor's authenticity. Roy Stemman gives a personal assessment.

I FIRST spoke to William Lang about 15 years ago. It was both an exciting and a curious encounter. And although I have spoken to him many times since and regard him as a friend, I still have not been able to shake off the rather incredulous feeling that engulfs me whenever we meet. William Lang, after all, died more than 40 years ago.

Lang was a well known surgeon in his day and an ophthalmic specialist. His patients included George Bernard Shaw and he counted William Morris among his friends. He was a small, bearded man with a thriving private practice but with busy hospital commitments, too. His association with the famous Middlesex Hospital, London, for example, was a long and happy one – and when his days of operating and caring for sick patients came to an end he continued to lecture and demonstrate there for several years.

He eventually gave up all medical work and spent many years in retirement before dying at the age of 84 in 1937. And there the story would have ended had it not been for a Liverpoolian named George Chapman. While Lang was enjoying his final years on earth, playing golf and reading, Chapman was being brought up by his grandparents in a poor part of Liverpool. He left school at the worst possible time, in the grip of the Depression, but managed to find work as a butcher, garage hand and professional boxer before joining the Irish Guards and then the Royal Air Force.

Chapman was 17 years old when William Lang died. Their paths had never crossed and they were unaware of each other's existence. The boy from Liverpool moved to RAF Halton, near Aylesbury, and married a local girl. Their first child, a daughter named Vivian, lived only a month and it was this sudden bereavement which caused the young airman – now a small arms and unarmed combat instructor – to seek an answer to the question that dwells on every mind at some time: is there a life after death?

His search for an answer was largely abortive until, having been demobbed in May 1946, he joined the Aylesbury Fire Brigade. One of the firemen had been conducting glass-and-alphabet seances and he invited Chapman to join in, with the result that he received evidential messages. These and the home seances



Dr Lang – the charming bedside manner of an old-fashioned doctor lives on in George Chapman.

he conducted with his wife convinced Chapman that life continues beyond the grave. But he was also told by the spirit communicators that he had been chosen to be a healer and, somewhat sceptically, he set about trying to develop his mediumship with a small circle of friends.

During these sessions he would go into a trance and various spirit entities would speak through him. These included a Red Indian and a Chinese surgeon, and at this stage Chapman's seances were no different to other run-of-the-mill Spiritualist get-togethers. It would also be very easy to dismiss much of what was said as wishful thinking. Chapman, however, was level-headed about his experiences and demanded as much proof as the next man. It came, unexpectedly, with the appearance of a spirit calling himself Lang who said he had been a surgeon.

At first he would say no more about his identity and Chapman's attempts to trace him failed because there proved to be many surgeons of that name in the medical record books. But once Lang had established a good working relationship with his medium and his work had become more widely known, he began to speak about his life on earth. Chapman and his helpers were then able to verify his statements.

At this stage in the partnership most

people were more concerned with what Lang did for the sick than who he was. His method of treatment was unconventional as far as spiritual healing was concerned and it provoked controversy, but the results spoke for themselves. I was able to see for myself how he set about treating his patients when I first met him in the early 1960s.

There was nothing wrong with me, as far as I knew, when I was shown into his dimly-lit consulting room but I asked the dead surgeon to give me a check-up. Chapman was then a clean-shaven man with dark hair, but despite his youthful appearance he spoke in a voice and with a manner which seemed to be of another age. He had the charming bedside manner of an old-fashioned doctor. After he had explained that his usual treatment was to operate on the patient's etheric body, I climbed on to a couch and watched as Chapman, eyes tightly closed, leaned over me and – controlled by Lang – carried out an examination.

All was well, he announced, but there was an indication that at some future time I might experience trouble with the tear ducts of the eyes and so he would correct them. I watched as his fingers began to operate just an inch or so above my face. He seemed to be handling surgical instruments and making an injection, yet his hands were empty. I felt nothing and when the 'operation' was completed there was no visible sign that anything had happened. But, according to William Lang, my etheric body (which serves as a go-between for the physical and spirit bodies) had been treated in order to rid me of a problem that had not yet made its existence felt.

Was it a charade? Was Chapman a clever actor who had learned enough medical terminology to bluff his way through these healing sessions? Or had I really been operated on by a dead surgeon?

I admit that the last possibility seemed so preposterous that it was tempting to dismiss it all as a clever fraud. But one thing intrigued me. As far as I knew there was nothing wrong with my tear ducts – but my mother *had* had such trouble to the extent of needing surgery to replace the ducts with artificial ones. A relative had had the same operation. So was it a family weakness; a hereditary

disease which the spirit surgeon had been able to see and eradicate? Or was it just a lucky guess and no more than coincidence?

There was another obstacle in the way of dismissing it all as a brilliant hoax – quite apart from the testimony of those patients who had been cured by Lang. When the last patient had gone I was able to meet Chapman. He and Dr Lang – as everyone calls the dead surgeon even though surgeons are not called 'Dr' – are totally different, in speech and mannerisms. And while the surgeon speaks with confidence and uses a large vocabulary, Chapman – a quiet and modest man – uses simple language, often stumbling over a word which he finds difficult to pronounce.

Having weighed up the evidence I decided that Chapman was genuine and that he was playing no conscious part in producing the William Lang manifestation. But was Dr Lang real or just a product of Chapman's subconscious? That was a more difficult question to answer because I did not know the surgeon when he was alive. Nor did Chapman, of course, but sceptics could argue that he may have come across information about Lang which he had since forgotten but which his subconscious had remembered and was now dramatising while he was in trance.

As time went by I came to accept Lang as a separate entity and a friendship developed between me and Chapman which has lasted over the years. I soon became aware, however, that there were aspects of his work which he did not discuss, even with friends. We would meet for a drink in London every so often and invariably he turned up carrying an old clock or an exquisitely carved box or some other valuable item from the past, usually inscribed with William Lang's name or initials. It transpired that these had once belonged to Lang and had been given to Chapman by the surgeon's former colleagues to whom they had been left. The Aylesbury healer came to London regularly to see those doctors, but the venue and the purpose, as well as their identities, remained a secret.

On later visits to Aylesbury I saw the Lang Museum – the complete collection of items which had once belonged to the London ophthalmologist. Chapman had installed a showcase to contain the smaller items; the larger pieces such as desks, wardrobes and bureaux were scattered around the large house. But their origin remained a secret and the question nagged away at the back on my mind: What did Chapman do on those regular visits to London?

The answer came in 1977 while I was collecting material for a book about Chapman which he intended to publish himself in France, where he had set up a centre. By this time, I should explain, he had become a globe-trotter, flying to Europe, America and other countries regularly so that Dr Lang could treat patients, and returning between visits to



George Chapman, who was 17 when Dr Lang died in 1937, outside his French clinic.

his Aylesbury home to see British patients and deal with his large postbag.

In May 1977 Chapman phoned me to say that his Auntie Lyndon had died in a North London nursing home. He had visited the 94-year-old lady regularly during her brief illness, following a fall, and had sat at her bedside discussing the times they had spent together over the last 30 years. She was not an aunt, he

revealed. They were not related at all. She looked upon him as a son and Chapman regarded her with the affection one normally feels for a mother. Yet the remarkable truth is that she was the daughter of the man who speaks through Chapman, and when the former fireman was in a trance she would address him as 'Father'.

Her name was Marie Lyndon Lang and her testimony to Chapman's mediumship is a remarkable statement. It confirms that for 30 years, starting just 10 years after his death, she spoke to her father through the Aylesbury medium. What is more, she also arranged for colleagues of William Lang and of his son Basil – who also helps the spirit healing team – to attend those meetings which were often held in her London home in Kensington. Further evidence of her support for Chapman and his work came when her will was published. Marie Lang left the bulk of her estate to him.

With Miss Lang's passing, Chapman was free to tell the full story and so we changed our plans and wrote a new book, *Surgeon From Another World* (W. H. Allen, £5.50), based in part on this unique testimony to life after death and partly on the healing results he has achieved in recent years, particularly in association with French medical men.

Here, then, we have an instance of spirit return which is confirmed by relatives (the testimony of Dr Lang's granddaughter, Mrs Susan Fairtlough, is also included in the book) and of healing which is confirmed by doctors.

It is a case which deserves a very special place in the history of mediumship . . . and medicine. α

After surgeons had carried out tests on Joseph Tanguy, a 29-year-old Paris shop assistant, they told him they had discovered a cyst in the brain and needed to operate. In fact, it was a tumour but at that stage they did not know if it was benign or malignant.

In April 1974 they operated and found the growth to be malignant. It was too dangerous to remove so they took away only a small portion. Then they broke the news to his young wife, Danielle, that he had only six months to live.

Today, Joseph Tanguy lives a normal life. After receiving treatment from William Lang the severe headaches began to diminish and subsequent medical tests showed the tumour was disappearing until, eventually, it was gone. The patient returned to work and his wife expressed her gratitude by becoming George Chapman's receptionist in France.

What makes Monsieur Tanguy's case even more remarkable is that it was his own doctor, Dr S, who referred him to the dead surgeon. His medical verdict is that M. Tanguy's cure is 'miraculous'.

URI GELLER:

IT IS more than five years now since Uri Geller first took Britain by storm. From the moment he appeared in this country controversy raged. Was he a psychic superstar, as some claimed? Or a brilliant conjurer who has us all fooled? Those who were able to see him perform his metal-bending and mind-reading feats were, for the most part, impressed. But some claimed to 'see through' his tricks and began a crusade to expose him.

In recent years, Geller has faded somewhat from the picture – but the metal-bending phenomenon has not. He left in his wake many people, particularly young children, who claimed to have the same powers. And, since Geller liked to wander the world (he has appeared on TV in 36 countries) and was not available for regular laboratory work, scientists had to study the phenomenon with these other subjects.

A central figure in the metal-bending controversy has been Professor John Taylor. Previously a sceptic, he was 'won over' by Geller's performance on TV and later in his own King's College, London, laboratory. But now Taylor has changed his mind about the whole subject, presenting his reasons in a paper to the scientific weekly, *Nature*, in November 1978.

Alpha invited a number of researchers to comment on Taylor's findings (see Page 23). But before reading their remarks and the summary of Taylor's paper, why not refresh your memory? We present here the Geller Effect story so far, from the date of the Israeli's first public performance.

It follows the claims of his supporters and his detractors, as well as the emergence of some of the other metal-benders in this and other countries. We also talk to another London professor, John Hasted, who has persevered with his metal-bending experiments (though he is less well known to the public than John Taylor). His latest work is concerned with monitoring minute changes within the metals which he does not allow his young subjects to touch.

The Geller Effect is a modern mystery: a controversy which has led to countless books and articles, scientific papers, and public debates on the subject – but nothing which convinces us either way about the nature of the phenomenon.

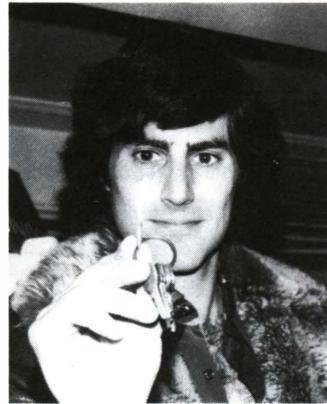
And yet it isn't a new story. In his day the famous Victorian medium Daniel Dunglas Home created a similar furore, as did the American Davenport Brothers and the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. They were all accused of trickery by conjurers while others vouched for the authenticity of the effects that occurred in their presence.

The problem we face in trying to evaluate such phenomena is that all too often people will see what they want to believe, and that applies equally to converts and sceptics alike. To some, the magic of psychic events brightens otherwise drab lives. To others they are a threat to their security: they do not like to have their belief systems shattered.

Financial challenges don't really help resolve the issue either. Conjurer James Randi has shown that metal-benders don't like performing in his presence – or at least the phenomenon does not occur even if the subjects don't mind trying – but does that really prove that they must cheat? And if Uri Geller accepts magician David Berglas's challenge and, for the sake of argument, out-performs Berglas, will that prove Geller to be psychic or just a superior illusionist?

The biggest problem for most of us, who have not had the chance to work first-hand with people like Geller, is to decide when to give the benefit of the doubt. Take a journey through time with our year-by-year analysis of the Geller Effect and you will see just how difficult it is to evaluate the evidence.

Alpha will, of course, continue to follow the story as it unfolds and even make contributions to the controversy. Our columns are open to anyone who has a useful observation or suggestion to make. Who knows, perhaps one day we will be able to report that the true nature of the Geller Effect has been discovered beyond doubt.



1969

October Uri Geller gives his first public demonstration, for £15, to children at the school of his close friend Shimshon (known as Shipi) Shtrang. He is so successful that he is soon able to give up his job with a textile firm and part-time work as a male model to concentrate on performing in nightclubs.

1970

March Geller signs a three-year contract as a performer with a manager who says he will be able to earn £1,000 a week.

October 5 The *Jerusalem Post* declares 'Telepathist Geller termed a fraud,' basing its story on the claims of four computer employees who have been able to duplicate most of Geller's stage effects by conjuring.

1971

August 17 Having heard of Geller's abilities a New York parapsychologist, Dr Andrija Puharich, arrives in Israel to see for himself. Puharich, a medical researcher and the holder of over 60 patents in the field of medical electronics, is impressed with the 24-year-old Israeli.

November 20 Dr Puharich returns to Israel to carry out more experiments with Geller. Convinced that Geller has astonishing psychic powers he returns to the USA and talks to fellow-scientists about the possibility of carrying out laboratory research with Geller in America.

1972

August The Israeli psychic arrives in the USA on his first visit and stays at Dr Puharich's home in New York where he demonstrates for several visitors, including Edgar Mitchell, the former astronaut – the sixth man to land on the moon. Mitchell is sufficiently impressed to pay for further research into Geller's powers. This is arranged for November.

October 30 Dr Ted Bastin, a Cambridge physicist who has an interest in the paranormal, witnesses Geller's phenomena at a London hotel, together with a journalist and businessman. A second performance takes place next day at the Berkeley Square office of the businessman, Tony Bloomfield. Dr Bastin, Dr Puharich and Shipi Shtrang are also present.

November 13 Geller begins five weeks of experiments with Russell Targ and Dr Harold Puthoff, both laser scientists, at Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, California. The results, when published (18th October, 1974) cause a tremendous controversy.

1973

February 6 Geller, together with Dr Puharich, accepts an invitation to visit the offices of *Time* magazine despite their anticipation that the journalists plan an editorial attack. Among those present is James Randi, a conjurer who works under the name, the Amazing Randi, posing as a reporter. Another witness is Charlie Reynolds, *Time* photographer and amateur magician, who gives Geller a key to bend. 'Uri bent it all right,' wrote Randi in his book *The Magic of Uri Geller* (1975), 'but not "by concentration"'. He simply put the tip of it against the tabletop and pressed. The fork trick was equally bold. . . .'

March 9 Film of Geller at work at Stanford is given a press showing at Columbia University.

October 29 Eldon Byrd, a scientist at the Naval Surface Weapons Center, Maryland, invites Geller to submit to an ingenious test. The Israeli is handed a small wire made of nitinol, an unusual alloy which possesses a 'memory' and which was not then generally available to the public. If nitinol is bent into another shape and then heated it returns to its original shape. But after Geller held the wire it took on a new shape and refused to return to normal. Byrd's verdict was: 'Geller altered the lattice structure of a metal alloy in a way that cannot be duplicated. There is no present scientific explanation as to how he did this.'

November 23 Geller appears on British television in the *Dimbleby Talk-in* and becomes an overnight sensation. Professor John Taylor, one of Dimbleby's TV guests, shakes his head in disbelief when the Israeli bends spoons and makes broken watches start. Soon after the show Professor Taylor declares that he intends to study how Geller achieves his results. The British press, mean-

the full story

THE GELLER EFFECT

while, are full of Geller's achievements as well as theories about how the results might be produced normally.

December 10 The *Sunday Mirror* conducts a long-distance telephone experiment in the hope that Geller, in New York, can correctly state what is on a photograph chosen at random in the newspaper's London office. It is a long and unspectacular experiment and the newspaper never publishes an account of it.

1974

January While watching a TV documentary about Geller a young British psychic attempts metal-bending and succeeds. As a result Matthew Manning is soon in demand not only for his other psychic talents, such as automatic writing, but also for producing Geller-type phenomena.

In the same month a Danish TV company calls in a well-known magician, Leo Leslie, to advise them on a programme on which Geller is to appear, in Copenhagen. Though not convinced by the Israeli's stage performance he manages to get Geller to demonstrate in his dressing room after the show. A journalist, photographer, psychologist and a woman from the studio audience are also present. As a result of what he sees, Leslie – well known as an exposé of fraudulent mediums – states: 'The judgement of all of us who were present for what occurred was one of total endorsement of Geller's paranormal claims: both his ability to bend metal and his talent for receiving telepathic signals.'

February 2 Professor John Taylor is able to carry out his first tests with Geller in the laboratory. As well as producing metal-bending effects Geller also causes a Geiger counter to register 1,000 counts per second on three occasions. Normal background radiation is two counts per second.

February 19 Geller is invited to lecture at Western Kentucky University, Kentucky, and agrees to be tested informally while there. The tests are conducted by Thomas P. Coohill of the Physics Department and the phenomena produced convince Dr Coohill that Geller has paranormal powers.

February 20 Back in Israel, news of Geller's growing international fame results in an exposure story in *Haolam Hazeh*, a Tel Aviv weekly magazine. The story contains this statement: 'In Israel today, however, his friends and relatives, his girl friends and his managers, and all others who

worked with him ... swear (that) they are able to demonstrate with their own hands all of his tricks that he used in order to create his reputation.' Among those who apparently gave their stories to the magazine was Hannah, Uri's one-time girlfriend and sister of his travelling companion, Shipi. The magazine detailed how eleven of Geller's 'tricks' could be performed.

February Uri Geller's British tour is cancelled suddenly. Geller says threats have been made on his life but sceptics claim it is because magicians plan to challenge him.

March 8 Dr George Owen, executive director of New Horizons Research Foundation, Toronto, carries out a series of tests with Geller on Canadian television.

(1975) that these experiments 'produced results which enormously widened the range of phenomena, and gave a very clear validation of Geller's ability to distort a wide range of materials'.

June 21 Geller visits Birkbeck College, London, to demonstrate for several scientists, including Professor John Hasted. Also present are Professor David Bohm, writer Arthur Koestler, and Dr Ted Bastin. He produces a number of apparently paranormal effects.

June/July British psychic Matthew Manning is tested in Toronto by Dr George Owen and his colleagues. Manning is asked to do eight experiments, one of which involves attempting to bend a key while his brain wave

hand above the capsules and Geller holds his hand above Hasted's. One of the witnesses, Dr Bastin, sees one of the capsules give a little jump – an effect seen by Hasted, too, when he removes his hand. On examination it is found that although the capsule is undamaged the foil inside has fractured – and half of it has disappeared.

October 17 The *New Scientist* publishes a 16-page report, 'Uri Geller and Science', which is highly critical of the Israeli psychic and gives an unauthorised preview of Professor Hasted's research – then criticises it.

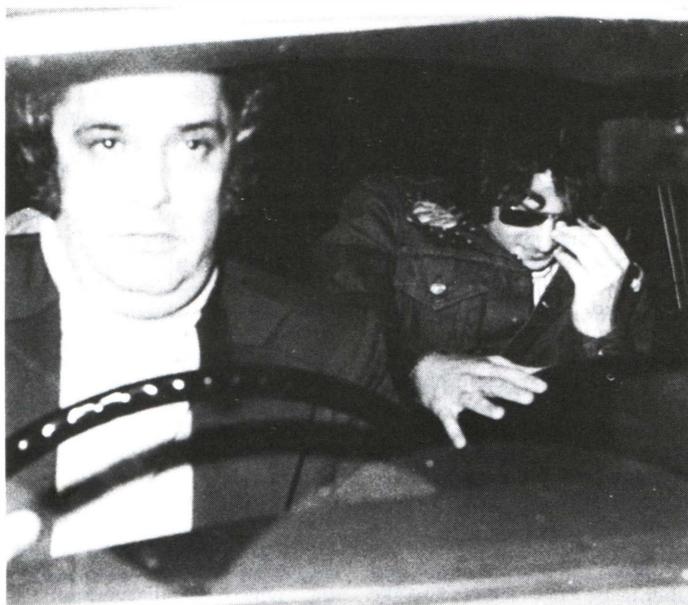
Hasted and Bohm subsequently write to the journal pointing out that the so-called 'explanations' of some of Geller's feats in the Birkbeck laboratory, put forward by the journal, are farcical. The *New Scientist* feature was planned to coincide with the next day's *Nature*.

October 18 The long-awaited publication in *Nature* of Puthoff and Targ's paper dealing with their psychic experiments at Stanford Research Institute – including telepathy (but not metal-bending) work with Geller. *Nature* introduces the report with a very guarded one-and-a-half-page editorial written by Dr Chris Evans. As a result of their work with Geller the two scientists declare: '... we consider that he has demonstrated his paranormal perceptual ability in a convincing and unambiguous manner'.

October 29 Geller is a guest on the BBC radio programme, *The Jimmy Young Show*, during which he demonstrates his metal-bending powers in the studio and asks if listeners notice any strange phenomena in their homes. As before, when he made a similar request on TV or radio, hundreds phone in to report an astonishing range of events.

October is also the month in which physicist Eldon Byrd repeats his nitinol experiment with Geller (see 29 October 1973) of a year earlier, to check that it is a repeatable effect. The test is at a private house in Connecticut and this time Byrd takes special precautions. Kinks form in three nitinol wire strips. After examining them in his laboratory Byrd states: 'Geller had clearly influenced the alloy nitinol in a most unusual way: it was as if the kinks he produced had actually been manufactured into the wires, even though it had been conclusively determined before any experimentation that the permanent configuration of the wires was straight lines'.

It was in 1974, too, that a biography of Geller, called simply



Uri Geller is whisked away from London at 3 am by manager Yasha Katz after cancelling his British tour in February 1974.

Though not rigorous scientific experiments the results are impressive and convince Dr Owen that they are paranormal.

April 24 William E. Cox of the Institute of Parapsychology, North Carolina, visited Geller at the psychic's New York apartment. Geller is unaware that, as well as being a psychic researcher of note, Cox is also a semi-professional magician. (Geller does not like demonstrating before magicians.) The Israeli succeeds in producing a number of phenomena and Cox declares, in a written report, that 'I so far have failed to find any support for hypotheses of fraud and deception of any variety'.

June 20 Professor John Taylor carries out a second set of experiments with Geller. The physicist states in his book *Superminds*

patterns are monitored. Not only did metal bending occur but the scientists recorded a new brain wave, which they called the 'ramp function'. In his report, Joel L. Whitton, MD, consultant psychiatrist of the Toronto Hospital, says: '... the result promises to lead to a new field of research whose interest may well extend beyond the merely parapsychological into more general realms of neurophysiological psychology...'

September 10 Geller is tested again, for the last time, at Birkbeck College, London. One of the experiments involves electron microscope foils 2mm in diameter and 0.2mm thick. Prof Hasted places three of these in transparent cellulose pill cases before Geller's arrival. Then, during the tests, the professor puts his own

the continuing

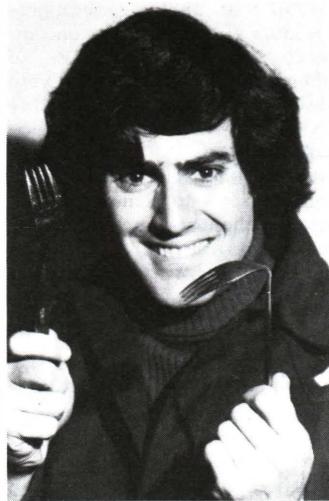
Uri, and written by Dr Andrija Puharich, was published. It was highly controversial because many of the reported events – of de-materialisations and human teleportations – strained the credulity of even Geller's staunchest supporters; and the situation was made worse by the revelation that Geller's powers were bestowed on him by extra-terrestrial beings.

1975

January An Italian family is watching Uri Geller on television when their 10-year-old son decides to try metal-bending, with instant success. Now Paride Giatti is being studied by researchers, including Dr Ferdinando Bersani, a physicist at Bologna's faculty of medicine, who testifies that Paride has stopped a watch balance wheel by thought and speeded it up in other tests.

April 6 Britain's *Observer Magazine* carries a story by Professor John Taylor of King's College, London, with a headline, 'How Geller convinced me'. It is a foretaste of his book, *Superminds*, to be published a month later, which describes Taylor's experiments with Geller and a number of young British children who came forward with similar powers after Geller's demonstrations. **April** Seven experiments are conducted this month with Geller by scientists, led by Albert Ducrocq, at the INSERM Telemetry Laboratories, Foch Hospital, Suresnes, France. Of the metal-bending results, Ducrocq has stated that the bends made by Geller 'could not be duplicated by ordinary manual means'. In the same month James Randi's *The Magic of Uri Geller* is published, in which the American conjurer sets out to show that the Israeli has no paranormal powers and all his effects can be duplicated. He names Shipi Shturang as an accomplice. Though it makes convincing reading much of the book is supposition and Targ and Puthoff have since issued a fact sheet pointing out 24 errors in one chapter alone, dealing with their SRI work.

May 16 In America a new 'psychic' goes on radio WMCA in New York City to talk about his strange powers. Almost immediately listeners begin phoning in, reporting all manner of strange phenomena in their homes. An hour later the calls stop abruptly when James Randi arrives at the studio and reveals that the psychic is really his assistant, Jim Pyczynski, posing as a metal-bender. They prove, with the radio station's co-operation, that the 'Geller effect in the home'



'Geller convinced me' – Taylor

reports are not as impressive as Geller's supporters claim.

June 2 A group of magicians watch a TV programme on Geller being made in America. Two of them, Artur Zorka, chairman of the Occult Investigations Committee of the Society of American Magicians, and Abb Dickson, are able to carry out tests with Geller privately after the show. They have come prepared, and Zorka begins by inviting Geller to bend a fork made of forged steel with a nylon reinforced handle. 'I specially selected this fork because of its extreme resistance to physical stress. I placed the fork in Mr Geller's outstretched left hand. His fingers curled around it, and in moments, without the fork's leaving my sight for even an instant, it literally exploded, sending fragments of the handle across the room.' As a result of this and other tests, Zorka states: 'It is the unanimous finding of this committee that although we, as magicians, can duplicate each of these test results using methods known by us, under the proper conditions . . . there is no way, based on our present collective knowledge, that any method of trickery could have been used to produce these effects under the conditions to which Uri Geller was subjected'.

July 25 James Randi issues a \$10,000 challenge to any adult or child who can produce a paranormal phenomenon to the satisfaction of a committee.

July 26 The London-based *Psychic News*, a weekly Spiritualist newspaper, carries a front-page story about a new 'psychic', James Zwinge, who has demonstrated his powers in its offices. The hands of clocks are put back and keys and spoons bend. The reporter states that Zwinge 'had no opportunity to interfere with them. He had been under con-

stant surveillance. I had not left his side, or taken my eyes from him, for one second.' But the 'psychic' was, in fact, James Randi, and all the 'phenomena' were produced by conjuring tricks. Contrary to the reporter's quite honest recollection, Randi had not been under constant surveillance.

September 4 Another blow for believers. *Nature* carries a report by Dr Brian Pamplin and Harry Collins regarding observations made with 'mini-Gellers' at the University of Bath. They gave six children, aged between eight and 13, the opportunity to cheat while attempting to bend metal and observed them through a one-way mirror. All but one were caught cheating. 'We can assert that in no case did we observe a rod or a spoon bend other than by palpably normal means,' they report, but add, 'We cannot, of course, conclude that all instances of the so-called Geller Effect are due to cheating.' The same issue of *Nature* carries a letter from James Randi pointing out that '... persons lacking expertise can easily be deceived by a person using very simple methods – if the predisposition to belief is there'. He tells how he took in a willing journalist believer, and ends with this provocative statement: 'The need to have a competent conjurer present at performances of this nature is very evident. Otherwise, the observations are of no value scientifically'.

October 20 Professor John Taylor and James Randi take part in a televised confrontation at the Royal Institution, London, during which Randi performs a rather unconvincing spoon bending effect.

October The US newspaper *National Enquirer* tells of a Geller test in which the Israeli is taken up in a balloon over Princeton, New Jersey, in order to transmit telepathic messages to the world. Readers of Britain's *Reveille* also participated. He transmits a two digit number, 59, and concentrates on two drawings, one of a tree, the other of a car. When the results are fed into a computer, Dr James Boyette, a University of Florida mathematician, is quoted as saying the odds are 'more than ten billion to one. There's no mathematical explanation for what happened. Geller must have incredible powers.'

1975 is also the year in which Geller's autobiography, *My Story*, appears. Although it plays down the extra-terrestrial aspect which was so important to Dr Puharich's biography, Geller does state: 'When everything is

added up, I don't really know what the intelligences want. If I know one thing, it is that these intelligences are working and communicating, no matter how hard that is for anyone to believe. My theory is that the energies are coming through me from a higher source'.

October 12 Following a radio interview in which he appealed for any listeners with Geller-type powers to contact him, Dr Zbigniew William Wolkowski, a physicist at the University of Paris, is introduced to Jean-Pierre Girard. He produces remarkable bends in prepared metals and Dr Wolkowski arranges for Girard to demonstrate for other scientists, including Professor John Taylor and Charles Crussard, research director of the Pechiney Company, on October 26 in Paris. In a subsequent paper Dr Wolkowski comments on the controversy between scientists and conjurers and observes: 'I note that André Sanlaville, an accomplished French illusionist, together with other professionals of deceit, has taken a favourable stand in respect to the "Geller effect" and Girard, from first-hand experience'.

1976

April An Italian magazine tells of a 14-year-old boy, Orlando Bragante, who has performed Geller-type feats to the satisfaction of researcher Aldo Martelli. As well as metal-bending it is claimed he has also caused a metal paperweight to dematerialise.

October A new Geller effect: healing. An American grandmother, crippled with arthritis, claims she can walk again after watching Geller on TV. In the same month British TV viewers see conjurer Randi duplicate Geller phenomena, including telepathy and metal-bending, under what the producers of 'Into the Unknown' regard as fraud-proof conditions.

December The *National Enquirer* invites readers to take part in another Geller experiment. They are asked to place metal objects or broken watches and electrical appliances on a photograph of the Israeli and concentrate at a pre-arranged time. As a result a teapot is said to have flown 16 feet across a room and a sewing machine started running by itself, together with numerous lesser wonders.

1977

May The editor of *Nature* and Dr Chris Evans fly to Grenoble to watch French metal-bender Jean-Pierre Girard perform. Three weeks later they return

story of Uri Geller

THE GELLER EFFECT

with James Randi who controls the experimental conditions. After trying for three hours Girard abandons the attempt, having produced no paranormal effects.

June Julie Knowles, 15-year-old English metal-bender, accepts Randi's \$10,000 challenge and five judges visit her home. She fails to produce any metal-bending effect.

September Professor John Hasted publishes a paper in the *Journal* of the Society for Psychical Research giving details of his latest metal-bending research which involves placing sensitive strain gauges inside keys and hanging them up remotely from the young metal-benders. One particular subject, 17-year-old Nicholas Williams, is featured in the report.

November Addressing a London audience, Dr Andrija Puharich says: 'On several occasions Uri Geller disappeared in front of us. . . . One evening in 1973 when Uri landed on a table in my house, I am certain he was transported in a split second and arrived at a point 36 miles away. I bear witness to that. I have observed it eight times.'

December James Randi continues to bait scientists with a letter to the *SPR Journal* criticising the complicated design of parapsychological experiments. He points out that the tests he has carried out involve simple but effective precautions with the result that no alleged metal-benders have been able to produce phenomena. 'The truth of the matter is that the simple, direct tests just do not produce positive results. Is it not time that we began to doubt the existence of these wonders?' In the same issue Professor Hasted replies at length to Randi's many criticisms, ending with the observation: 'Experiment design had bet-

ter be left to professional experimenters and not to professional deceivers'.

1978

January 19 A two-hour test is conducted in a Paris laboratory, organised by TFI, a French television channel, but Jean-Pierre Girard fails to produce any paranormal effects. But TV and film cameras do record results with the French metal-bender when he appears before 700 delegates at the first International Congress of Paranormal Phenomena in Mexico City. A German researcher, Professor Hans Bender, has also testified: 'Tests that other scientists and I carried out prove his remarkable powers'.

April 6 Writing in *New Scientist* James Randi reports that Yasha Katz, Uri Geller's one-time manager who brought him to England, has admitted in an interview on Italian TV (Randi was the interviewer) that he helped Geller fake physical and mental phenomena. He also claims that although he had an agreement with Geller to manage his career for a percentage, Geller has never paid him.

June 1 *New Scientist* publishes a reply from Geller in which he says 'every accusation put forth by Mr Katz to Randi is based on fabricated stories and lies. . . . I have disconnected any association with Yasha Katz, who was never my manager - but a business associate and to whom I do not owe a penny for any services he may think he rendered.' The same issue contains a reply from James Randi who, in dealing with Geller's claim never to have been caught cheating, has this to say: 'One needs only to refer to such investigators as Richard Kammann and David Marks, in New Zealand, to learn that Geller has indeed been caught "red-handed" many times. These two prominent psychologists filmed him receiving signals from the audience, bending a key physically (aided by the usual distraction), and performing much as Katz revealed in his admissions.'

September The controversy continues in the columns of the *SPR Journal* with another letter from Randi in which he says that the 'proof' offered for Jean-Pierre Girard's powers is of such a ridiculous nature 'that I have lost all respect for his supporters in France.' Furthermore, in a reference to their earlier debate, he agrees with Hasted's view that experiment design should be left to professional experimenters, but adds, 'It had better not be left to incompetent and gullible experimenters who fail to observe

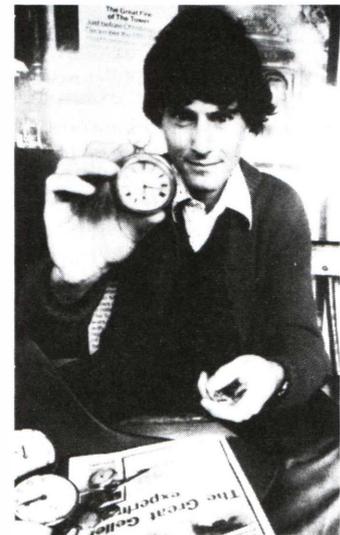
the simplest of precautions. When scientists get back to science, we "deceivers" can get back to the business of entertaining, rather than explaining the real world to the academics.' This drew the comment from Hasted that Randi has never left the entertainment business, 'nor the metallurgists left their metallurgy, nor the instrumentalists their instruments'. And he adds that paranormally induced structural changes in metal, without bending, are claimed and he is preparing a paper on it, presumably leaving Randi to wonder how that effect can be produced by conjuring.

October 30 Uri Geller has been 'off-stage', as it were, for a long time and the question, 'What has happened to Geller?' is often asked. The answer comes today from the *Daily Mirror* which starts serialising his story and conducting yet another psychic experiment with its readers.

October 31 Today Geller turns the tables on the sceptics who issue challenges. He offers £50,000 'to any magician who believes my telepathic powers are just a conjuring trick - and thinks he can prove it'. A few days later conjurer David Berglas announces on BBC radio that he has accepted the challenge.

November 2 *Nature* publishes a paper by Professor John Taylor and Dr E. Balanovski entitled 'Can electromagnetism account for extra-sensory phenomena?' (See Page 21). They argue that electromagnetism 'is the only known force that could conceivably be involved' in the production of such phenomena as metal-bending, psychic healing and dowsing. They did not detect any in their tests with psychics. Referring to their conclusions, the *Daily Telegraph* science correspondent reports: 'Professor John Taylor, the scientist who five years ago endorsed the spoon-bending and other supposedly supernatural tricks of Uri Geller, today retracts his opinion and concludes that there was nothing supernatural about them at all'. The *New Scientist* of the same date, while welcoming Taylor's paper, admits, 'Of course, Taylor may be wrong. There may be an unknown physical explanation for paranormal phenomena.' And there is criticism that Taylor also dismisses non-metal-bending effects, such as telepathy, 'merely because they do not fit his electromagnetic hypothesis - a much looser criterion of proof'. The writer, Lawrence McGinty, concludes his comment with these remarks: 'The important point is that

Taylor now seems to accept that if science cannot explain the "Geller effect", we must jettison the phenomena, not science. Taylor's personal journey through the valley of irrationality is illuminating. It would be reassuring to think that his conversion to rationality will have an even greater impact than his gullible endorsement of Geller. Unfortunately, that seems highly unlikely'.

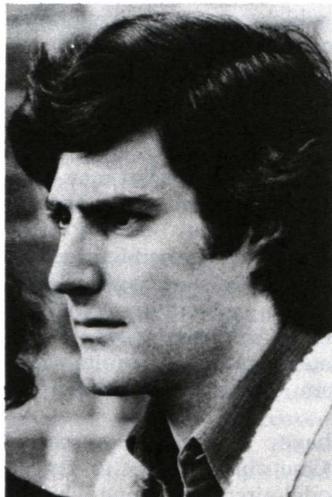


Geller on top of Blackpool Tower for a *Daily Mirror* experiment in November 1978.

November 10 Announcing the results of its Geller experiment, the *Daily Mirror* says it is 'treemendous'. From the top of Blackpool Tower Geller had beamed out a mental image of a drawing of a tree. The chance of merely guessing was one in 150, says the newspaper, but one in 28 of those readers who responded were right. Many people reported strange events - such as a broken TV and a hairdryer mending themselves.

November On Dutch TV a well-known magician, Henk Vermeyden, testifies that he could detect no trickery in a Uri Geller spoon-bending demonstration. The Israeli had not been told that Vermeyden was in the TV studio audience.

December According to the *American National Enquirer*, Italian metal bender Orlando Bragante continues to baffle scientists. In one test he succeeded in bending a marked fork in a box. The fork, with two others was placed in the box on top of a piano while Orlando played for 15 minutes. When the box was opened only the marked fork had bent. Orlando, 16, comments: 'When I leave school, I want to be an electronics engineer. I'm not interested in being a magician. Parapsychology is only a hobby.'



A new twist to metal bending

Despite the controversy surrounding Uri Geller, several scientists are sure that paranormal metal bending does occur. Professor Hasted has spent the past four years investigating the phenomenon with the assistance of a group of gifted children. David Harvey investigates.

IT CAN be inconvenient if you play a musical instrument. Guitar strings go out of tune, for example. We have a girl who plays the bassoon and the keys distort.' These reports by some of the children who act as subjects for John Hasted, professor of physics, Birkbeck College, London University, underline the unpredictability of the metal-bending phenomenon. It was something he had discovered from his experimental work.

It has led Professor Hasted to conclude that metal bending is not an ability in the sense that it is a skill, like playing the guitar, which can be learnt and called on at will. Rather, it is a spontaneous event that may or may not happen when someone wants it to occur. It can happen, as the musicians found, when least expected. He has also found that the phenomenon is associated with particular people.

Professor Hasted is one scientist who has no doubts that paranormal metal bending does occur.

Unlike John Taylor, who has struck out in many different directions, Hasted has concentrated his attention solely on paranormal metal bending for the past four years with the help of a number of children in whose presence it occurs.

He makes no attempt to explain it away but simply accepts that it happens. Nor, despite all the controversy, is he coy about his conviction that this odd phenomenon occurs. 'I'm quite willing to stand up and be counted,' says Hasted. In answer to his critics he adds, 'I'm sure we've got the experimental conditions right.'

His interest in metal bending is, he says, as a physicist rather than a paranormalist. 'Physicists should be on the look out for things that don't conform to known laws. That's the starting point for new theories.'

While it was Taylor's exploration of the mysteries of the mind that led to his investigation of the paranormal, it was not until Geller came on to the scene that Hasted showed any interest.

'My academic background was in Oxford. It was a very sceptical environment. There's nothing in my earlier career that ties in with this.'

His involvement began in 1974 when Geller came to Britain. Hasted remem-



Professor John Hasted: 'Once I get hold of something I won't let go.'

bers his first encounter with Geller quite clearly but pulls out a well-thumbed notebook from a shelf behind him. 'Yes, it was 5 pm, 5 February at the Selfridge Hotel.' A group of scientists, including Hasted, had arranged to visit him there to see just what all the fuss was about. Hasted was impressed. 'I was confident he didn't fool me.'

'If it hadn't been for another physicist telling me about Geller's metal-bending claims, and if it hadn't been for a good observation the first time when we visited him in London, I wouldn't have become involved. I suppose chance comes into it. But once I get hold of something, I won't let go.'

From then on, he has continued to conduct experiments with some of the many children who claim to be able to generate the Geller effect.

Much of the criticism that has been levelled at experiments on metal bending is that insufficient care is taken to rule out fraud. Hasted has made the conditions as exacting as possible; no touching is a crucial rule for experiments. Two or three observers watch the proceedings which are sometimes video-taped.

Hasted's attention has been concentrated on what happens to the metal during paranormal bending. The metal targets, either latch keys or discs, in which strain gauge sensors are embedded, are suspended by wires. The gauges record the smallest stresses on a meter and register the strength of the effect. Sometimes, Hasted has had signals alone with no visible distortion, something which occurs relatively rarely 'perhaps one in five sessions.'

Currently he has 15 children on his books 'but only four are strong.'

Why children, rather than adult metal benders, who are much rarer finds?

His theory is that the effect may have parallels with poltergeist phenomena in which children are usually the epicentres. The effects generated seem to weaken with the passing years. Those that succeed in generating powerful effects work in different ways. Some, claims Hasted, can get results from across a room. Others work within a few feet.

Some have a distinctly casual approach. One child prefers to get on with his model-aircraft building while at

the same time attempting to bend a piece of metal suspended in the same room. 'It should be remembered that the conscious mind of the subject is only involved in the most general and oblique way,' says Hasted.

Aside from their common motivation to achieve results, there appears to be little similarity in their approach to the task. But, observes Hasted, they generally tend to exert far less psychological effort than is found with Geller or Girard.

Another factor which seems to be equally important is the environment for the experiment. Friendly and familiar surroundings seem to be more productive than the alien laboratory. Rapport with the subject also matters, as does the active support of the parents. 'Since the desire and ability to bend metal does not usually come on demand, the chance of observing the phenomena is much larger in the subject's home than if a visit is paid to the investigator's laboratory,' he says.

Despite the fact there are not always visible bends in the metal, there may still be detectable changes in the material itself. French metallurgists discovered an unusual 'churning' effect inside the metal, an effect which Professor Hasted confirmed following tests on a Concorde metal sample.

Examination of a cross section of the metal shows that it gets harder in the middle, although on rare occasions it softens (an effect known as semi-viscous creep). 'It's not a question of some force field coming from the subject,' Professor Hasted told the annual conference of the Society for Psychical Research in 1978, 'it's the movement of atoms inside the metal.' He has also studied the signals received from several strain gauges embedded in different parts of a piece of metal to see if there is anything that can



Just some of the metal samples which Professor Hasted's young subjects are said to have bent paranormally.

be learnt about the extent and direction of the bending effect on the metal.

So far he has been concerned primarily with the details of the process, rather than looking for an explanation. He has identified various effects. In some cases there has been dislocation of the crystal structure of which the metal is constituted.

Most recently he has identified evidence of an electromagnetic field, discovered when he wired up the metal object to be bent so that a low voltage current passed through it. The wires were connected to an amplifier so that any physical contact produced an audible signal. 'I actually did this without telling the subject to make sure that the suspended disc was not being touched.'

After the session had begun, Hasted heard the signal. But it was being produced without any physical contact and from a distance while the subject was busy on his remote metal bending. It

increased in amplitude as the session continued. During this he complained of a pricking sensation in his thumb, said Hasted. Neither Hasted nor the other observer found they could generate a signal without touching the disc, nor did they experience similar sensations. This new discovery has led him to conclude that there is 'an ionisation exchange between the subject and the metal when a current is passed through the object.'

The fact that his results have failed to impress certain sceptics does not bother Hasted. Just as some allege that certain people have a deep need to believe, he maintains that for cultural and psychological reasons there are some who will never be able to accept paranormal phenomena at face value.

A predisposition to believe . . . a predisposition to disbelieve: if individual psychology is the key factor, then perhaps there never can be agreement about the evidence. α

. . . and a straight answer from Professor Taylor

Can electromagnetism account for extra-sensory phenomena?

This was the question posed by a paper published by *Nature* 276, on 2 November 1978 that summarised the research findings of Professor John Taylor and Dr E. Balanovski.

The experiments covered four extra-sensory phenomena in particular: psychokinesis, metal bending, psychic healing and dowsing.

'In looking for EM (electro-magnetic) signals emitted by people during alleged ESP events we are therefore testing the reality of the corresponding phenomena.'

The experiments were carried out on the assumption that the evidence for ESP is not firm either way.

Four groups of effects were identified from the investigations:

(1) the effect occurred, but could be explained in normal scientific terms. A psychokinesis experiment required the subject to concentrate on rotating a straw on a plastic disc floating on the surface of a glass of water inside a dome. Rotation occurred. But it was found that the cause was an electric fire that set up convection currents inside the dome. When the fire was switched off, the effect ceased.

Another experiment, the attempted rotation of a compass needle, successfully achieved, is concluded to have had an electrostatic cause.

(2) the effect occurred and could have been paranormal (dowsing and psychic healing).

(3) the effect occurred in less than perfect conditions. Sixty-eight subjects were involved in 268 metal-bending trials and under the strict experimental conditions, 'no metal bending at all was obtained'. Only under more relaxed conditions did anything happen. 'We gave them the benefit of the doubt and tested them also in their more accustomed setting, where they were sometimes apparently successful. We still obtained no EM signal.'

(4) the effect did not occur (in some metal bending, telepathy and distant viewing trials).

In no case was there any trace of 'unusual EM radiations'. That, and the fact that 'all the subjects always claimed to be in a good psychic state, causes us to question the paranormal nature of those in categories (2) and (3), because we contend that EM is the only known force that could have been involved in the phenomenon.'

So what is the explanation for dowsing? '... muscular twitches brought about by subconscious mental activity'.

And faith healing? '... purely (albeit complex) psychological effect of the healer on the patient.'

Turn the page to find out what other psychic researchers think of Professor Taylor's paper, and an interview with the man who changed his mind.

. . . Alpha asks researchers to assess Professor John Taylor's 'Nature' paper



Left in an impossible position

Professor Arthur J. Ellison, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, City University; President, Society for Psychological Research. I am happy to give my views on Professor John Taylor's *Nature* paper of 2 November, 1978, 'Can electromagnetism account for extra-sensory phenomena?'

First, I have been expecting something of the kind from him since the first SPR International Conference of 1977 when he described this work. He said then that 'metal bending must be caused by the weak forces of the atom, the strong forces of the nucleus, gravitational forces or electromagnetic forces. There isn't anything else.'

He then said that it could hardly be one of the first three and therefore it must be the last. He then described his work, given now in detail in the *Nature* paper, which showed that it was not the last. Unusual electromagnetic fields do not appear around metal benders.

That left him in an impossible position, either disbelieving the evidence of his own eyes that metal sometimes did bend paranormally, or accepting it and having his tidy little world of physics completely upset. Now we know what his choice is! Metal does not bend paranormally!

I am not surprised. John Taylor was brought into Uri Geller's first TV programme to give a scientific opinion. He watched Geller's 'metal bending', under conditions which no experienced parapsychologist would describe as acceptable 'test conditions' and from which nothing could be firmly deduced, and expressed himself as completely baffled. He then evidently resolved to solve this mystery of how metal was paranormally bent – and to do it single handed. And we know the result!

The theories of science – the fields and forces and other elements in the models scientists build to represent our experience

– are not permanent, unalterable: they change constantly. The changes occur as a result of well ascertained facts that do not fit. Every true scientist understands this.

There are no unalterable 'laws of the universe' which we 'discover' once and for all. Parapsychologists appear to have observed a number of facts of experience which do not fit the current scientific paradigms. The answer is not to suggest that because they do not fit they do not exist.



Few scientists ever held the hypothesis

Harry Collins, lecturer in Sociology, Bath University

Series of experiments alone rarely settle scientific controversies. It is always possible to dispute the findings of experiments by questioning the adequacy of their design and the conditions under which they were carried out. The most that the report of a series of experiments can do is to move the view of the majority of scientists one way or another. I will try and assess the likely impact of Balanovski's and Taylor's paper on the majority view.

The most significant impact of the paper will probably be the result of Taylor's change of mind about the existence of paranormal phenomena. The paper would have far less impact on the scientific community if it had come from a 'dyed-in-the-wool' sceptic. That aside, the impact resulting from the detailed content of the paper will be uneven.

Its most unambiguous contribution will be toward lessening the credibility of the hypothesis that paranormal phenomena, if they exist, are mediated by electromagnetic radiation. The credibility of that hypothesis must by now be practically nil. However, very few scientists ever held the hypothesis, so the paper will not bring about much change in opinion in this regard.

The least effective argument of

the paper is that the disproof of the EM hypothesis makes a large contribution to the disproof of existence of paranormal phenomena. This is based on the 'deduction that it is the only known force that could conceivably be involved. . . .' Other scientists would question the relevance of this deduction. Some scientists believe that certain interpretations of the quantum theory can explain paranormal phenomena. Some scientists believe that the paranormal must be explained by as yet unknown forces. Taylor believed this in 1971:¹

'If these various [paranormal] phenomena are accepted as valid and not fraudulent . . . [they] may then be taken as evidence of a new field of force, generated by this new faculty, of a different nature from the four basic ones of the physical world: electromagnetism, gravity, nuclear, and that causing radioactivity. . . . [various experiments indicate] that this fifth force is certainly not electromagnetic. . . .' (Taylor 1971 p 221-2)

Nevertheless, I believe the paper will have a significant, if not decisive, effect on scientists' beliefs as to the existence of paranormal metal bending. This is because the observations reported represent a sizeable proportion of all the attempted laboratory observations of this phenomenon, and satisfactory evidence of the existence of the effect was not obtained.

These results accord with the result of Pamplin and Collins (1975)² and later experiments done by Collins, with Pinch, Hasted, and others but not reported. The experiments done by Taylor and Balanovski in our laboratory were certainly done with care and patience and manifest encouragement of the experimental subject. No doubt, they are representative of Taylor's whole series.

Thus they warn scientists that paranormal metal bending is, at best, extremely hard to observe and will discourage all but the most dedicated from further experimentation. They do not finally disprove the existence of the effect for variables such as personality of the experimenter may still be crucial to success. They will shift majority opinion away from belief in the phenomenon to a significant extent.

The paper will probably not have the same significant impact on ideas about telepathy, remote viewing and other phenomena discussed. This is because the experiments reported make up only a very small proportion of all the work done on these subjects.

References

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- ²Pamplin B. and Collins H. M. 'Spoon Bending: An Experimental Approach' *Nature* 257, 8, (1975)



This conjecture does not follow from the evidence

Professor John Beloff, Department of Psychology, Edinburgh University

We have here a striking illustration of what sometimes happens in science when we ask the wrong sort of question. The question which these authors asked themselves may be stated briefly as follows: If there were such things as psi phenomena (ESP/PK) what kind of radiation would they involve? And the answer they came up with was that the *only* kind of radiation that *could* be involved was electro-magnetic (EM) radiation, most probably of a very low frequency.

In their research they were concerned principally with two special cases: (a) cases of supposed telepathy and (b) the 'Geller Effect', that is the supposed bending of metal objects without the use of muscular force.

They report that, in general, there was no evidence of EM radiation in either case but, when they repeated their experiments with more stringent controls, there was no evidence of any paranormal activity either. At this point they were entitled to conclude either (1) that the original effects they observed were nevertheless genuine and so their hypothesis must be rejected or (2) that those effects were spurious and so it was not possible, in their investigation, to test their hypothesis.

Instead, they concluded that there probably are no real psi phenomena after all and so there is nothing to explain. They are, of course, entitled to this conjecture but it does not follow from the evidence.

The one important lesson to be

continued on Page 30

The man who changed his mind

For several years Professor John Taylor has been regarded as a believer in paranormal powers. His 'Nature' paper shows that his position has changed. He talks to Alpha about the wide range of phenomena he has examined.

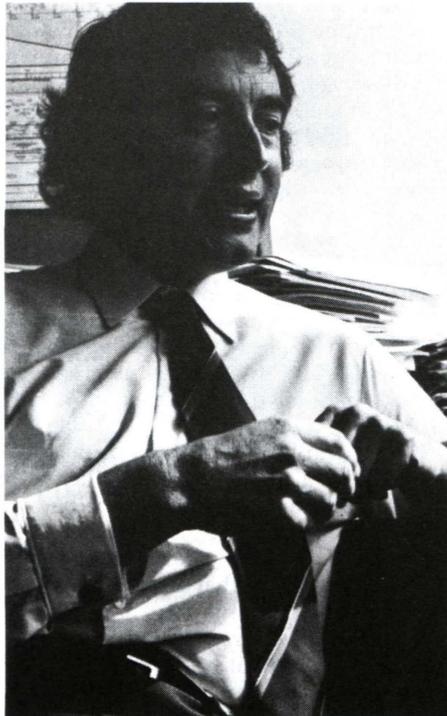
I FELT as if the whole framework with which I viewed the world had suddenly been destroyed. I seemed very naked and vulnerable, surrounded by a hostile, incomprehensible universe.' Professor John Taylor's frank admission of shaken bewilderment made after witnessing Uri Geller's extraordinary demonstrations is now history.

Since that statement was made, several years of research and theorising have intervened. Professor Taylor's strong conviction has been replaced by equally powerful doubts. He has retracted his endorsement of Geller – asked if he still believed that the Israeli possessed paranormal gifts, he told *Alpha* 'I'm not sure about that.'

As for the paranormal itself, he has spent a considerable amount of time in the past three years exploring normal explanations for alleged psychic and supernatural phenomena. To be more exact, he has been looking for evidence that would support such abilities as psychokinesis, metal bending and dowsing and failing to find it. At the same time, he has said – and this is consistent with earlier statements in *Superminds* and elsewhere – that if such odd events can be induced, there must be an explanation that is consistent with known laws and forces of nature. In particular, he is keen on the theory that such effects must, if they occur, be the result of some electro-magnetic activity. 'If anything, my ideas have hardened. It's electro-magnetism or bust,' he told *Alpha*. 'That's all it can be.' Under his own experimental conditions, he has found nothing. Details of his recent research were published in *Nature*, and comments from academics with a special interest in this field, will be found on Page 22.

His interest in the whole field of paranormal phenomena predates Geller's advent on the scene. Taylor traces it back to the sixties, when he started investigating the nature and potential of the mind. 'I was looking at the subject to see whether there were any other facts about the mind that are not contained in normal psycho-physiology.' The territory he has covered is vast.

'I've been interested in trying to understand whether there is a reasonable scientific explanation and validation



Professor John Taylor: there can be no explanation outside electro-magnetism.

of life after death, precognition, astrology, dowsing, metal bending, moving of objects, materialisation, dematerialisation – you mention it and I've looked into it.'

Our understanding of the mind and its inter-relationship with the brain and the material world is still far from complete. Until we have all the facts to work on, it's inconceivable that we'll get any nearer to the truth. What excited Taylor was the possibility that some of the unanswered questions could be clarified, and even solved by an investigation of alleged psychic and related abilities.

'Some of the facts about the mind we contain and carry around with us: our own experience. Some we get from the experiments of psychologists and psycho-physiologists. But it seemed to me that some of the facts might arise from the phenomena we usually call paranormal, where the mind seems to be able to move around or suddenly reach down and bend spoons or go across vast distances and use telepathy or clairvoyance.'

Since paranormal events are always

associated with people, an investigation to discover whether these effects were no more than extraordinary extensions of mind power that had been mislabelled as separate and beyond the natural human realm, seemed promising.

It also explains why Taylor has cast his net so wide. 'I was looking for common clues, common features of the various phenomena. If they're all caused by the mind, then there should be something. And, if you think, as one would normally suppose as a scientist, that there is some means of channelling energy into external situations and achieving certain effects, such as PK, one would expect that there is this common feature of energy moving around.'

The search has been problematic; the results far from conclusive.

Although Taylor strongly defended the metal benders in the earlier *Superminds* days, his findings from the battery of experiments written up in the *Nature* paper were doubly negative. Out of 250 metal-bending tests, none of the children succeeded in producing distortions in the metal objects under laboratory conditions. Nor, hardly surprisingly, in consequence, was there any evidence of electro-magnetic energy. He does add that some of the children apparently achieved a metal-bending effect in less formal and relaxed conditions. These, of course, did not count for experimental purposes.

Notwithstanding the lack of experimental evidence, Professor Taylor maintains that there can be no explanation outside of electro-magnetism. 'Do you not leave the door open to any other possible explanation at all?', *Alpha* asked him. 'No, I don't,' came the crisp reply.

Professor Taylor had little time for those scientists who advance theories for paranormal goings-on based on quantum mechanics and parallel universe theory.

'I've worked in quantum mechanics for a quarter of a century and a lot of what is said doesn't make sense. The parallel universe theory says that each time you make a measurement, the universe splits into the various possible results of the measurements. Now, the fact that we take a particular branch in the split is of course a feature of the universe we are living in. But we don't

know about the other splits because they haven't occurred and parallel, or branching, universe theory was set up in such a way that we shall never know.

'To try and claim that we are getting jumps from one branch to another disagrees completely with the theory. Somehow or other, someone has slipped in, possibly in an implicit way, a disagreement with standard parallel or branching universe theory. I would like to see where the disagreement is precisely. But no one seems to want to say.'

Nor does Professor Taylor accept that there are internal paradoxes and inconsistencies in the standard explanation of measurement that open the way for such theorising.

'It's a very ad-hoc way of explaining paranormal phenomena which seems to me to contain these strange philosophical needs that people have.'

Are these 'philosophical needs' responsible for other distortions and misinterpretation of the facts? From what Professor Taylor has to say about certain other categories of alleged psychic and paranormal faculties, it is clear that he thinks that the evidence has often been interpreted in a way that overlooks more ordinary explanations.

He is very reluctant to come to conclusions about precognition on the grounds of research known to him. He prefers to dismiss cases of recorded instances of precognition of events on the basis that 'one doesn't know what the chance levels are.'

His argument on precognitive dreams of disasters is that the odds are so high that someone is going to have a 'disaster' dream, and interpret it as precognitive when something does happen, that it is highly dangerous to jump to conclusions.

If Professor Taylor's doubts about the claims made for cases of precognition arise from what he considers to be inadequate validation, it's an objection he also raises about telepathy tests run by Douglas Dean and others: 'very interesting, but inconclusive.'

He illustrates the nub of the research problem, the repeatable experiment, with an example from his own field, elementary particle physics.

'You can't just take one group's word for a discovery. In any field of science, you have to take a number of groups' results. Take the rumours that were going round before the discovery of new particles in 1974. "Somebody's found it!" . . . "No they haven't." It just happened that it was such a narrow particle, you had to do the experiment very carefully. So it wasn't until the right conditions were found that the experiment could be duplicated in other places. I think that duplication is absolutely essential.

'Now this comes to the question of what criteria you apply to say something has been proved, or not. It's down to repeatability. I do feel very strongly that unless you have a repeatable experiment, then the results are not to be

depended upon. They are suggestive, maybe. But you can't hang your hat on it, and say that's really what happens.'

But not all paranormal phenomena are susceptible to this kind of closely controlled experimental investigation. Along the line, Professor Taylor has looked at life-after-death evidence which has included messages given by mediums when you have to take what ever comes. Where messages concern verifiable information they can be checked, and a few notable cases have concerned historical data that has subsequently been corroborated. Such was the case with the evidence presented by the mediums Mrs Piper and Eileen Garrett.

'There are claims that this material could not be obtained by anyone living. But as I've said, the powers of the human mind are absolutely remarkable at storing information. One just doesn't know. Of course there are claims that there are cross correspondences between messages given by different mediums. But again, you have to be careful that you're not choosing what you're wanting to find. It's suggestive, maybe, but not proof.'

His own assessment of what he has heard from mediums is blunt: 'Rubbish. That's what comes from the mouths of mediums. But that's been my experience. It may have been an experimental problem.'

What would constitute convincing evidence of a medium's authenticity? It was something Professor Taylor had to give some thought to.

'It's hard to think of information that could be obtained that is not known to anybody else, in any way, in a library recorded somewhere, because otherwise how do you know it's information?'

But he did come up with some suggestions. 'We don't know what pool of knowledge the dead have, if they have any. Assuming that there is, then I would ask them questions such as how to quantise gravity or what happened at the first 10⁻⁴ of a second of the big bang that started the universe. Or why there is a new heavy particle, the epsilon. These are questions no one on earth knows the answers to, yet. They may in three or four years time. But if they come forward with the answers now, we could go away and test those answers. Then I might believe that there is something out there.'

'Whether it means that there is life after death, or whether it means that there is extra-terrestrial intelligence that is being contacted, is another thing. But it would mean there's something better than us. That's the sort of evidence I would really begin to take notice of.' As well as pursuing the suggestion of life after death in mediumistic circles, Professor Taylor has also looked at regression under hypnosis, when people reveal details of what could be earlier existences.

'I was interested in the case of Edmund Ryle, who claimed that he had lived an earlier life as John Fletcher at the time of the battle of Sedgemoor, and I

concluded that there was not a correct level of accuracy in what he had to say. I've also worked with a hypnotist who regressed several people. I wasn't convinced by them either.'

Once more, it was the problem of verifying evidence 100%, to exclude all doubt. Professor Taylor is also not sure that people are likely to be recalling earlier lives.

'Some people suggest that the subject is in some way playing a game, or taking a role that the hypnotist asks them to take. He has already talked to them beforehand and told them he wants them to give details of earlier lives. So they dredge up interesting cases that are relevant to their personal situations. They may contain a great deal of historical accuracy and interesting things that it would be difficult for them to have brought up in conscious discussion, but which are difficult to check.'

Difficulties of one sort or another seem to have frustrated Professor Taylor's investigation of the paranormal. In some cases, it has proved impossible even to get to first base. 'I have made several attempts to meet Gordon Higginson, the materialisation medium, but without success,' he adds with a touch of ironical amusement.

Happily, though, not all subjects prove so difficult. 'I find many healers are very accessible. I have always been impressed by the fact that so many have great sincerity. I'm very impressed indeed by the community of healers who, in so many cases, deal with dying people. I think they're remarkable people.'

Since Professor Taylor's whole journey into the paranormal was begun to give him further insight into the nature of the mind, we asked him where his nearly two decades of research had taken him. Did he think that the mind was a separate entity that could survive death?

'I think that the answer from science is that it would be impossible for the mind to keep going and retain the information we have acquired through our life time.'

'It doesn't look likely to be able to exist after death. In any case, from what we understand about the way information is stored in the brain in terms of the neurons and their connections and the way they are modified by experience will indicate that that is not easy to continue after death. In fact, the neurons die out on death and that would seem to be the problem with the mind after death. So my present ideas are to do with the mind and whether it is completely non-physical or completely physical, that is just contained inside our heads.'

After the rather excited speculation of the *Superminds*' days, Professor Taylor seems to be taking a much more sober and circumspect view of the paranormal. It may disappoint those who look to him for more positive conclusions following his earlier enthusiastic statements. Others, no doubt, will welcome his return to 'normality'. α

Can premonitions save San Francisco?

A scheme to collect and analyse premonitions has started in the earthquake zone of California

ERYL MAI JONES told her mother she had dreamed that she had gone to school but there was no school there. 'Something black had come down all over it.'

Next day nine-year-old Eryl went to school and the dream came true. Half a million tons of coal waste slithered down on to the little Welsh mining village of Aberfan, killing Eryl and 139 others, mostly children.

That was over 12 years ago. But out of the Aberfan horror grew a bureau, set up by a London psychiatrist, which was designed to avert similar disasters, for little Eryl was not the only person who had a premonition about the tragedy. Within hours of the avalanche, on 21 October 1966, people from all over Britain were reporting that they, too, had 'seen' or dreamed of the dreadful event. The problem was that taken individually the premonitions were meaningless.

One woman, for example, dreamed of a mountain flowing downward and a child running from it screaming. Another saw children dressed in Welsh costume ascending to heaven from their school. Even more explicit was a woman's dream in which she saw screaming children buried by an avalanche of coal in a mining village. An elderly man saw the name Aberfan in bright letters in a dream, though he had never heard of it until news of the tragedy was broadcast.

A Plymouth, Devon, psychic – a Mrs Mildren – also reported a vision while in trance in which she saw a schoolhouse in a valley being buried by an avalanche of coal. Among the people she 'saw' digging for bodies in the slag was a man with a strange peaked cap watched by a little boy whose hair was in long bangs. The vision occurred on the day before the tragedy, and while watching TV coverage of the rescue operation three days later she saw exactly the same scene, with the man and the boy, just as she had seen in her vision.

The London psychiatrist who investigated these premonition claims was Dr John Barker. He narrowed them down to 60 which he felt were sufficiently detailed and substantiated to regard as authentic, and found that 36 occurred in dreams. He regarded the evidence for premonitions as overwhelming, based on this single tragedy, and decided that the strange gift should be harnessed to try to save lives.

After all, if all the people who had had



Aberfan where 140 people, mostly children, perished beneath a mountain of coal waste.

these premonitions had been able to send them to a central agency, the pieces of the jigsaw may have fitted together in time to alert the residents of Aberfan to evacuate their doomed village.

So, out of the Welsh disaster grew the British Premonitions Bureau, which was set up in London in 1967, and the Central Premonitions Registry in New York a year later. Now, with the lesson of Aberfan still very much in mind, an English psychical researcher who works in America has been instrumental in extending the bureau scheme to the West Coast of America in the hope of reducing the death toll when the inevitable San Francisco earthquake strikes.

Since Aberfan the various bureaux have logged many premonitions, some of which have appeared to be impressive after the event, but none has so far succeeded in averting a disaster. Nevertheless, Dr Douglas Dean of Newark College of Engineering, New Jersey, believes that monitoring premonitions in California could work. He told *Alpha* during a visit to England last year.

'Analysis of the Aberfan premonitions showed that there was a gradual build up for about a week before it happened. The biggest number occurred on the night before the coal tip slipped. If we can monitor earthquake premonitions then we should be able to see the gradual increase and give a warning before the peak.'

In order to do so, two bureaux have been set up in California – one at Mon-

terey, south of San Francisco, the other at Berkeley, on the north-east shore of San Francisco Bay. Additional back-up may come from long-distance dreamers who report their premonitions to the Central Premonitions Registry, which is run by a *New York Times* newspaperman, or from a similar bureau which operates in Toronto, Canada.

The difference between Aberfan and San Francisco is that the Welsh tragedy was totally unexpected whereas nearly everyone expects the Californian city to suffer an earthquake before long – they just don't know when. It sits on the San Andreas Fault, the greatest fracture anywhere on the Earth's crust, and has suffered several severe quakes, including those of 1864, 1889 and 1906. The last major quake was on 18 April 1906, when a large section of the city was destroyed, some 700 people died, 28,000 buildings were demolished and 250,000 people were left homeless.

'The next San Francisco earthquake is going to be devastating,' says Douglas Dean. 'There's been no major movement since 1906 and the earth's going to move 50 to 60 feet when it happens.'

But it remains to be seen if the residents of San Francisco will heed the warnings even if premonitions do start pouring in. There have been false alarms in the past, after all, and who could blame them for not fleeing every time a psychic foresees their destruction.

***Alpha* has established a premonitions bureau. See announcement on Page 4.**

ORACLE on UFOs/ley lines/healing/

Welsh tourist trap

The Welsh are nothing if not resourceful. So persistent had the Broad Haven UFO sightings on the Pembrokeshire coast become that the South Wales Tourist Board thought they had an additional regional speciality to lure tourists.

So, in conjunction with the Sir Benfro Hotel, outside Milford Haven and four miles from Broad Haven, the Board promoted UFO-spotting weekends. People flocked from London, Germany and even China to get a sight of the mysterious comings and goings on the coast.

The weekend package was dreamed up by a member of the Tourist Board who even went on one jaunt herself as part of the publicity build-up. Although the trip was made more out of a sense of duty than interest, she came back with a rather different attitude to UFOs, after watching a 'pulsing red light in the sky'. After that, she is inclined to take the reports more seriously. 'This UFO business frightens me rather', she confessed. 'But it's no bad thing for the tourist trade.'

UFOs and ley lines

One of the most important rules in any field of investigation is to separate fact from fiction, or for that matter speculation and rumour. Once the dividing lines become blurred, it's easy for people to fall into the trap of making unwarranted assumptions and deluding themselves.

While talking to Paul Devereux, the editor of the *Ley Hunter* about the Dragon Project (see p 3), I learnt that long before anyone had gone into the matter properly, people were talking as if there was an indisputable connection between UFO sightings and ley lines. The correlation is still not proved conclusively, but an initial analysis in 1978 showed that there did seem to be some correspondence in 47% of the cases.

Ley circles

Having only a limited knowledge of ley lines I had assumed that these alignments of ancient sites were always in straight lines. David Furlong, however, demonstrates that ley circles exist in conjunction with major lines, in issue 87 (1978) of *The Ley Hunter*. He has discovered two interlocking circles on Marlborough Downs, both of the same diameter and with their centres lying within the arc of the other.

David Furlong will be writing on the geometric significance of these ley circles in a later issue of this fascinating bi-monthly jour-

nal, but meanwhile he has given enough information to whet our appetites. Around the circumference of each circle are churches and earthworks as well as a very notable ancient site, Avebury, whose ring of standing stones are on a greater scale than the more famous Stonehenge.

Avebury, it is well known, stands on a ley which apparently runs from Bury St Edmunds, through Glastonbury and on to St Michael's Mount in Cornwall. And again, Furlong's interlocking ley circles are geometrically significant because the axis of their centres runs parallel to that ley.

Finally, he observes that the radius of each circle is 5.96 miles, a distance which occurs with regularity in ley work and is the same distance which separates Stonehenge and Old Sarum.

For more information about ley hunting, turn to Page 3. *Alpha* will also be dealing with the subject, in depth, shortly.

Star-crossed in Venice

Recently, a writer friend was on a tour operator's promotional trip with a group of journalists. Among them was a travel correspondent-cum-astrologer who does the stars for a daily paper and several magazines.

The day the party was due to return from Venice, she consulted her charts and predicted it would be the best day of the year for travelling by air – you could hardly hope for a more confident, definitive statement. Within hours, the party found itself fog-bound at the airport and were stranded overnight. They finally got away a day late . . . astrology and weather-forecasting seem to have much in common.

High-flying psi

Psychic research has always suffered from a lack of funds, which is surprising really when one considers the importance of the fundamental questions about life and death which it tackles.

Fortunately there have been several benefactors over the years, particularly in the United States, who have encouraged research projects. I was, therefore, pleased to see in the October issue of *Psi News*, the bulletin of the Parapsychological Association, that James S. McDonnell, chairman of the American aerospace giant, McDonnell Douglas Corporation, has given financial backing to a worthwhile psychic cause.

As well as attending last year's 21st annual convention of the association he helped make the occasion an international event

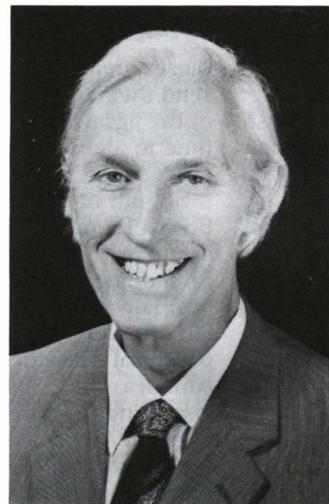
by providing travel grants to several overseas participants.

Mr McDonnell's interest in parapsychology goes back to his college days at Princeton.

Boost for healing

In a recent issue of the medical journal, the *General Practitioner*, Dr Alec Forbes, a consultant at Plymouth Hospital, wrote about his own experience as a healer. In the article, he describes how he has successfully treated some patients suffering from chronic conditions for which orthodox treatment offered little hope. With a nod to Heir eken's now famous slogan, Dr Forbes suggests that 'spiritual healing refreshes the parts that other therapies cannot reach'.

Statements by members of the medical profession, such as Dr Forbes, clearly do much more to influence the attitudes of other doctors than any claims by laymen. The National Federation of Spiritual Healers, referred to in the article, has already received a dozen enquiries from doctors interested to learn more about the treatment Dr Forbes describes.



Dr Alec Forbes, a consultant and a healer.

Attempt to censor

The *London Spiritualist*, under the editorship of Walter Earrey, has been an outspoken critic of many aspects of Spiritualism and has singled out a number of mediums whom it considers deserve a rebuke for their activities. I don't always agree with what it says or the way it says it, but I strongly defend its right to be critical.

I was, therefore, particularly concerned to read a report in *Psychic News* (16 December 1978) which indicates that some of the magazine's 'victims' are trying to censor its outspoken editorials.

Gordon Higginson, president of the *Spiritualist*' National

Union and a well-known medium, has been criticised by the *London Spiritualist* (as well as other publications) for various reasons, but chiefly for his mediumship which has been the subject of much controversy. Now Higginson has told *Psychic News* that he plans to refuse to demonstrate at any Spiritualist church which sells *London Spiritualist* or advertises in it.

Since well over 40 churches advertise their services in the monthly magazine, and Gordon Higginson demonstrates regularly at many of them, his decision – if he goes ahead with it – will make life very difficult for them. Doris Stokes, according to *Psychic News*, has made the same threat. I hope the churches are courageous enough to stand up to such blackmail.

What puzzles me is that Higginson does not extend the same threat to churches which sell or advertise in *Psychic News*. After all, it too has criticised him or given space to others to voice displeasure. Indeed, the newspaper carried a very strong complaint about Higginson just three weeks earlier – from a Somerset lady complaining that he had failed to honour engagements. He made various excuses for not turning up but it was subsequently discovered that he was appearing elsewhere at the time.

TV mysteries

Work has begun on a multi-part series for Yorkshire TV about some of the world's wonders and controversial mysteries: everything from ley lines to the Loch Ness monster will be covered. The link man for the series is science-fiction doyen, Arthur C. Clarke.

Discovering Britain's spiritual heritage

Americans have traipsed round Britain's stately homes for decades in the hope of catching a glimpse of one of their legendary ghosts. More recently, visitors with a more serious interest have been coming to Britain to discover its rich spiritual heritage.

Two Worlds Travel has been promoting tours for people who want to find out about the mystical traditions associated with such places as Glastonbury and Stonehenge. Visitors also have a chance of meeting some of Britain's leading authorities on healing, psychic research, meditation and mediumship. The tours last two weeks and usually involve between 15 and 20 people. So far, they have been run for Americans. But Two Worlds Travel hopes to put together programmes for the home market. If you

psychic surgery/spirit photographs

want to find out more, get in touch with Two Worlds Travel, 2 Kidderpore Avenue, London NW3 7SP (01-794 9124).

Dr Mead and temptation

Dr Margaret Mead, the eminent American anthropologist who died in mid-November, last year, aged 76, had a keen interest in psychic matters. Her books had a tremendous impact, particularly those which explored primitive societies and the implications they had for modern life.

In her introduction to Targ and Puthoff's book, *Mind-Reach* (1977), Dr Mead says, 'there is good reason to believe that the practitioner of an uninstitutionalised art – such as a prophet or healer or diagnostician – may have limited understanding or control of his or her special capacities. There is therefore a tremendous temptation to include various kinds of tricks in the practitioner's repertoire, in case the little understood and unreliable power fails.'

How true. It is this very fact which makes it so difficult for researchers to speak with certainty about psychic abilities.

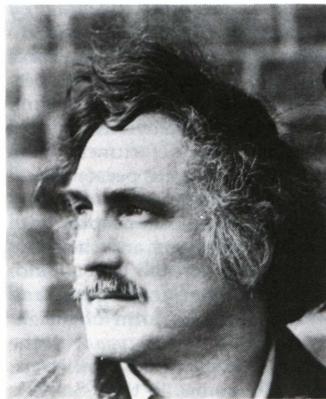
Psychic transplant?

Those who thought that Andrija Puharich had gone as far as he could go, in terms of gullibility, with his biography of Uri Geller, may soon have to reassess the situation. In the book *Uri* he claimed that he had witnessed dematerialisation of tape cassettes, heard metallic voices speaking independently of Geller, and seen Geller encounter a UFO.

Until that time, Dr Puharich was respected by most psychic researchers for his excellent work on telepathy and drug-induced psychic states. More recently he studied the work of the great Brazilian psychic surgeon, Jose Arigo. But the appearance of *Uri* dismayed many of his colleagues.

A more recent book, *Prelude to the Landing on Planet Earth* by Stuart Holroyd, only confirms their worst suspicions, for it tells an astonishing story of three people (one of whom is Puharich) who embark on a peace mission to various countries, believing they are in communication with extra-terrestrial beings.

So what will fellow psychic researchers make of his latest exploits? I understand that he has been in Mexico working as an assistant to a psychic surgeon whose powers seem to be even greater than those of Arigo. One researcher who attended a conference in Mexico told me that he had heard Puharich describe a remarkable psychic operation.



Dr Andrija Puharich helps psychic surgeon carry out kidney transplant.

The medium – a woman – made an incision in the patient and removed his kidney. Puharich, who was helping with the operation, held a new kidney over the incision. He felt a sucking sensation and the kidney was drawn into the body, making it the fastest transplant operation in 'medical' history.

Hopefully, when Dr Puharich is ready to reveal all about this latest experience, he will be able to provide us with better evidence than he did with Geller. However, one thing troubled me on hearing this story. Even supposing the event occurred exactly as described, where did the *new* kidney come from?

It seems that human organs required for these transplant operations are acquired from a local hospital. Which only serves to make the report even more gruesome!

Negative reply

My colleague, Roy Stemman, is puzzled by the strange attitude of *Psychic News*, the weekly Spiritualist newspaper for which he once worked. During his days as assistant editor he learned that a famous psychic photographer, John Myers, was about to visit these shores.

Myers, once a dentist in London's Victoria, became a successful American businessman after he developed the ability to produce 'psychic extras' (usually the faces of dead people) on photographs of the living.

Roy asked editor Maurice Barbanell if he could arrange for Myers to try producing psychic pictures, under simple test conditions, during his visit to London, and the famous medium agreed. Roy went to purchase the miniature colour film needed for Myers' Minolta camera and a number of exposures were made in Myers' Hilton hotel room.

But there the test conditions ended, for Myers suggested that he take the film back to the States

to be developed, and Barbanell agreed. When the results eventually arrived they contained several allegedly successful 'extras', two of which were immediately recognisable as the face of Hannen Swaffer, the well-known Fleet Street journalist who was a Spiritualist and a friend of Barbanell and Myers, and Marilyn Monroe, who needs no introduction.

What troubled Roy about the Swaffer picture was that it looked vaguely familiar. He soon realised that it was a reverse image of a painting of Swaffer which was hanging in Barbanell's office. How, you will wonder, did that get onto Myers' film? Well, it could have done so paranormally, of course, and as our interview with Michael Bentine shows, Myers was capable of producing very evidential results. But Roy felt that an alternative suggestion was worthy of consideration. The man who painted that portrait of Swaffer was none other than . . . John Myers.

If Myers kept a photographic copy of the portrait – which is highly likely – then it would have been easy for him to fake the 'extra' and reverse the image. Roy does not say that he did so, only that before one claims that a phenomenon is paranormal all the obvious alternative explanations have to be ruled out. Roy made his observations known to Barbanell at the time. The psychic 'extra' never appeared in the columns of *Psychic News*.

And there the mystery would have remained but for a comment in *London Spiritualist*, last year, about Myers and an allegation of fraud against him. Roy felt that the strange episode of the Swaffer 'extra' ought to be on record and so he wrote a letter to the magazine, which was published, setting out the facts as I have presented them here.

Barbanell, who as the biographer of Myers (*He Walks in Two Worlds* 1964) is clearly convinced that he was *always* genuine, jumped to the defence and declared that Roy was writing nonsense and should know better! He suggested that to have faked the 'extra' Myers would have had to sneak into his office to photograph the Swaffer portrait without anyone seeing him.

That, of course, is a preposterous idea because it ignores the simpler solution: that Myers could have photographed it when he finished painting it. But when Roy replied in that vein *Psychic News* did not publish his reply. He complained to Barbanell about suppression of his views and was told, 'In my editorial judgement it did not merit publication.'

That, of course, is not good enough. An editor is not entitled to make a personal attack on someone else's views and then refuse to publish a reply and Roy lost no time in pointing out that, unless his letter appeared, he would consider taking up the issue with the Press Council. Barbanell then had second thoughts, but instead of publishing the whole of Roy's letter he made reference to it in a subsequent issue of the newspaper, describing it as 'Roy's latest theory' (Roy hadn't offered any others!) and adding that he could not offer a shred of evidence.

Though still not satisfied with the way Barbanell had handled the matter, Roy wrote again saying that, rather than continue the protracted argument, he would like to suggest a way of resolving the matter. Would Barbanell be prepared for a member of the Society for Psychical Research to examine the psychic 'extra' and the portrait and say if Roy is right in claiming they are the same? Or, would he like the Survival Joint Research Committee – of which Barbanell is a member – to nominate a photographic expert to carry out the examination?

Barbanell's reply was short and to the point: 'I see no point in continuing this correspondence, and will not answer any further letters on the subject.'

A request to publish the photographs in *Alpha* has also been turned down by Barbanell 'because I have already reproduced them in *Psychic News*'. An odd explanation from a newspaper which advertises its photographic library in a weekly journalists' magazine.

Only an examination of the two 'exhibits' can determine who is right but that cannot take place without the newspaper's agreement. Barbanell probably thought that by refusing to answer any more letters on the matter he had been able to duck the issue successfully. When he reads this, he will realise that – now that *Alpha* is in existence – it won't be so easy to turn a blind eye to such matters.

Predictable postal problems

Some countries are extremely fussy about what you can, or cannot, send through the post.

In Britain, providing you don't want to send explosives, dangerous chemicals or porn by mail, you haven't got much to worry about. It's different elsewhere.

Switzerland bans the sending of horoscopes through the post. Nigeria won't allow astrological material to be sent by mail either. No doubt astrologists find this a predictable problem.

BOOKS

The Ghost of Flight 401 **John G. Fuller**

Souvenir Press, £4.50

This is a ghost story with a technological slant. Rather than the more familiar tales of hauntings that refer back to events centuries ago, it is associated with a tragic and, perhaps, avoidable, air disaster a few years back.

As an Eastern Airlines L-1011 TriStar, with 176 passengers and crew aboard, was approaching Miami airport one night in December 1972, a small, but possibly significant fault was discovered. The warning light that indicated whether or not the nose wheel was lowered and locked in position didn't come on. So, to play safe, the captain decided to circle the airport while trying to replace what the crew had decided was probably a defective bulb. It proved to be a difficult and unexpectedly fiddly task.

During this time, the plane was on automatic pilot. Now, the system was so designed that a nudge on the control stick released the plane from automatic pilot and returned it to manual control. But the trouble was that the instruments continued to read out misleadingly the setting on for automatic pilot. So the plane could be diving while the altimeter held a steady, but false, reading. With everyone engrossed in what had become something of an irritating problem, this is precisely what happened. The aircraft came down in the pitch-black Florida Everglades with the loss of 99 lives, including the pilot Bob Loft and Don Repo, the chief engineer. Ironically, investigators discovered that the nose wheel was locked in position, despite the malfunctioning light.

The crash was the start of a series of hauntings. Stewardesses and members of flight crews on other TriStars began reporting appearances and even communi-

cation with the dead captain and engineer. Their purpose, it transpired, was to give warning of faults and to avert other disasters.

John Fuller's book is an investigation of the whole series of events, beginning with a rather over-long and grisly reconstruction of the crash and subsequent rescue operation. It is a tribute to the context of the story that it transcends the repetitive and glutinous style in which it is recounted.

His follow up of the reports of ghostly appearances is where the more interesting detective work begins. But it was made difficult by the hostile treatment of flying staff who made reports to Eastern Airline management. Since psychiatric referrals and the threat of groundings were held over staff, few were prepared to talk. So many of the interviews Fuller staged appear under pseudonyms to allow them to speak more freely about their experiences. This is the main weakness of the story. But it makes for compelling reading. Part of the search for explanations led Fuller to mediums who contacted the dead captain and engineer.

Eastern Airlines have described the whole story as 'poppycock'. The matter can quite easily be resolved. The flight logs are the key to the affair. If there's nothing to it, then there will be no references in the log books, which Fuller's informants claim do contain details of encounters. In this case, the burden of proof seems to be on Eastern Airlines.

David Harvey

Numerology **Austin Coates** **Mayflower, 75p.**

Numerology is an ancient system of reading personality. Its known history goes back to the beginnings of written language. Although *Numerology*, the book,

is subtitled *How to Tell Fortune by Numbers*, Mr Coates is at pains to point out that the procedures indicate nothing more than personal strengths, weaknesses and inclinations. Obviously our futures, our fortunes, are influenced by our personality – but other factors intrude. And numerology makes no play with tall dark strangers and the fickle Lady Luck. On the other hand, knowing your strengths and weaknesses is a form of insight which can help you cope with the fickle Lady – and tall dark strangers, if it comes to that. So does numerology provide insight? And does *Numerology*, the book, give adequate insight into numerology the system?

Taking the second question first, *Numerology* is a simple, easy to follow guide to the mechanics of entering, and interpreting, your own or other people's numerological characteristics onto the nine number grid. The mechanics are easy enough; it took me a couple of hours to produce grids for myself, wife and two children. And, I must admit, following Mr Coates detailed instructions on the meanings of different configurations of numbers, I arrived at reasonable character analyses of the four of us. Had a friend given me these run-downs on the family I would have been impressed: if a total stranger had done – and after all those nine numbers are, as it were, total strangers – I would have been extremely impressed.

And I find that puzzling. A simple code converts names into numbers which are ticked off on the three by three square: 3,6,9; 2,5,8; 1,4,7, and, along with the date of birth and a combination of name and birthday numbers, that's the mechanics completed. Now Mr Coates gives plenty of information on how to use the numbered square, and he gives some fascinating case histories (from Francis Bacon to Noel Coward), but *how* is not enough. I would have liked even the slightest inkling as to *why*. Just one chapter on the philosophy and ideas associated with numerology would have improved the book a great deal, even if, in the end, the explanations were unconvincing.

But does numerology really give insight into character? I can only say that I am unconvinced. Mr Coates has left me with an open mind and a desire to know more about it all. And at 75p that's not a bad bargain. If you should be thinking about belated New Year resolutions, why not base them on a quick numerological analysis. If nothing else it will give you a method of thinking seriously about yourself, your

strengths and weaknesses: and maybe that is the major strength of numerology. *Ray Brown*

Sungods in exile **Karyl Robin-Evans** **Neville Spearman, £3.75**

An extraordinary mixture of what appears to be projected fantasy and careful observation, this is a book that will delight and amuse anyone who enjoyed Eric von Daniken (*Chariot of the Gods? et al*). It is a journal account of a trip undertaken by himself to Tibet to seek out the legendary Dzopa, a strange and eccentric tribe high in the Himalayas. They claim to be visitors from another planet. Like a superb detective tale the story unfolds from the discovery in India of a strange disc-like metal thing that gains and loses weight, to the final escape of Robin-Evans from the Dzopas after leaving one of their young women with child.

The disc is what led the Oxford scholar into the search. This strange and rather primitive inanimate object which came into his hands had drawings on it, writing, and this ability to alter in weight from day to day. He discovered it was associated with the legendary Dzopas and then determined to set out into the heart of Tibet to find them and learn what he could about their culture and society.

After a long and arduous journey, an audience with the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, and many conjectures as to what he might find, he located them ... a group of dwarf-like, decidedly unattractive beings who had lived in isolation for generations and were full of surprises. Living among them he learned about their 'history', visits what they claimed was the 'mother ship' that brought their ancestors here (now the home of their hereditary ruler) and took a look at other 'discs' similar to the one he had found which were stored in a special place with a number of other 'recording devices' which were said to contain records of the Dzopa history and their coming to earth.

The Dzopas claimed to be the ancestors of the human race ... brilliant philosophical people who visited here briefly and mated with some female apes in order to produce a creature which later through evolution became what we now call man.

Then as a result of conflict on their own planet, another group of Dzopas supposedly arrived via the mother ship in the year 1017 and became stranded. They could not return to their own planet. They underwent physical changes and degeneration and lost much understanding of how to use the 'treasures' they'd

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BOOKS

brought with them, until today they are able to do nothing but preserve and protect them and hope that sometime they will rediscover how to make use of them.

The tale sounds absurd until you read Robin-Evans' blow-by-blow account of it all. He appears to be a man without much imagination and with a great deal of rather self-seeking scepticism all of which lends credibility to this apparently impossible tale. His general observations about Tibet, the way of life in a Tibetan monastery and his meeting with the Dalai Lama certainly have the ring of truth about them. The whole story leads him up to his extraordinary conclusion:

'Remember the rape of the tree-living female apes by the side of the great sea and how the Dzopa men departed, leaving some of them pregnant with half-grown foetuses of whom some at least must have inherited the space-explorers' intelligence in earth bodies . . . you and I are half Dzopa.'

And if this notion is hard to swallow, the unusual and fascinating story of how Robin-Evans came to make such a judgement is certainly not.

Leslie Kenton

SPELLCRAFT, Robin Skelton

Routledge and Kegan Paul,
£3.95

Spells are part of the human condition, as much today as in centuries past. Man has always felt the urge to change or influence events, whether to ensure a safe journey or a successful hunting trip, arouse love, bring rain in a drought or victory in war, and the borderline between the primeval spell and the Christian prayer, as Robin Skelton points out in his thoughtful and fascinating 'Manual of verbal magic', is often a narrow and shadowy one. 'Many of the prayers and hymns of the Christian churches are spells, in both form and intent', he points out – the very word 'Amen' ('so be it') indicates this.

The chief difference is that the spell – here defined as a piece of verbal magic designed to have a specific effect upon the physical world – sets out to command, the prayer to beg. Prayer is essentially a supplication or invocation to a higher power, whereas invocation is only one kind of spell, and some of the names invoked can be designed to arouse the darker forces of the psyche, carrying the risk of a self-destructive psychic force.

As Skelton, a poet and Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature

who teaches at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, examines the various categories of spell – invocations, incantations, blessings and protection, binding and bidding spells, love spells and healing spells – he illuminates many parallels in everyday 20th-century life. Our legal oaths and marriage vows, for instance, are really nothing more or less than binding spells; healing spells, those most readily accepted by the modern scientific spirit, have much to do with psychosomatic medicine, and magical-style rituals survive in abundance, from Masonic practices to the fashionable theory that plants respond to friendly conversation.

A self-confessed 'spell-maker' of twenty years' experience, Skelton is convinced that 'spell-making is a skill, and can be learned by anyone with sufficient psychic energy and powers of concentration.' Whenever anyone prays or wishes intently, he points out, he or she is in effect sending out telepathic messages of potentially dynamic force, though for most people, the intention is so loosely directed (or in the case of prayers, so over-familiar is the formula) that it is only occasionally effective. Only by learning how to put together telepathic messages in the necessary clear and powerful fashion can results be obtained, Skelton argues, and this is what he sets out to impart in his handbook.

But this is far from being some kind of handy guide to witchcraft. Skelton approaches his survey of spell-making, both historical and practical, with a decently detached spirit. He speaks of the 'deep mind' which the spell, either spoken or written, aims to awaken for telepathic purposes, and warns of the risks of arousing dangerously conflicting energies when the

deep mind resists the conscious wish expressed in the spell. 'The intent is all,' he cautions. 'Those who choose to make curses are invariably cursed themselves. . . . Those who seek power over people for the sake of the pleasure that power gives them . . . will certainly destroy themselves.' The story of Faust has a psychologically sound basis.

It follows that the spell-maker should seriously examine his or her motives, because self-interest can rebound disastrously. Skelton believes that love spells are difficult to perform successfully because self-interest is usually very much involved: 'On the other hand, love spells which are entirely unselfish, or bidding spells which call up a lover, are usually successful.'

Many of the spells, both ancient and modern, quoted in Skelton's book are moving and effective poetry in their own right, particularly some of the love spells. The shorter and simpler the message, the better, is Skelton's belief – one reason being that most people find it difficult to keep up psychic concentration for long.

The final chapter, 'Ways and Means', sets out practical advice on composing your own spells and developing a suitably receptive state of mind for the telepathic waves to work.

Successful spell-making, is a matter of concentration, an art to be mastered with self-discipline and practice. Meanwhile, the important thing, Skelton emphasises, is always to ask oneself: 'Is it a creative thing to do? Does it enhance the quality of human life in any way?' Once assured of that, the cultivation of any latent psychic powers one may possess can only be beneficial – and to that end, Skelton's book provides much practical interest as well as pleasurable and scholarly reading.

Carol Kennedy

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drawn from this whole farcical episode is why the initial assumption which prompted their research – i.e. that psi phenomena must involve radiation of some sort – is itself a misconception. Consider the case of telepathy where some kind of radio analogy may at first seem very tempting and has always had its supporters. Now the only way in which we can communicate our thoughts to others, by normal means, is, in the first instance, to express them in words. For, whether the person we are addressing is sitting opposite us at table or is on the other end of a telephone line to Australia, he will not understand what we say if he does not know our language.

Language is, of course, a conventional system for encoding information and can function only if it is shared by both parties. What, however, is the equivalent in the case of telepathy? What coding system is in operation there? Unless one can give an answer, however vague or gen-

eral, to this primary question it is futile to speculate as to what might be the physical carrier for the encoded information.

Balanovski and Taylor never even raise this primary question, presumably because they realise that there is no answer. The answer they give to the secondary question is therefore an irrelevancy. For, even if our brains were high-powered EM generators (instead of being the very weak sources that they are) nothing whatsoever would follow from this fact.

When I think of a tomato there is no identifiable characteristic of my brain state that unambiguously denotes the idea of a tomato. And, even if there were, there is no conceivable way in which by irradiating another person's brain from this source could automatically produce a corresponding brain state. Consequently, all their talk about EM carriers is entirely beside the point. Indeed, if by some freak occurrence they had obtained positive results these would have been just one more oddity that we would then have had to explain. In itself it could explain nothing!

The argument with respect to the case of PK is somewhat more complex because we need to know whether the effect in question is just some meaningless perturbation such as one might get from an explosion of some sort or whether it is such as expresses a definite intention on the part of the subject.

If the authors regarded the Geller Effect as of the former kind then, surely, the logical thing for them to have done would have been to take a metal bar and irradiate it with massive doses of low frequency EM from some suitable power-source to see what happens in the most favourable circumstances even without a subject.

But, if they consider that the intention of the subject was relevant to the effects observed, then, once again their hypothesis makes no sense. For how, after all, could an intention automati-

cally translate itself into action by a mere emanation from the brain? In the normal situation we depend on feedback from the environment which enables us to monitor the changes taking place and to direct our energy so as to bring about the goal intended. Here, too, the primary question with any control system is the flow of information, the physical mechanisms that serve to carry that information are incidental and secondary: Once more the authors have got hold of the wrong end of the stick.

But if they have clearly asked the wrong question, what is the right question that we should be asking? Alas, we do not know. The mind is still largely a mystery. We do not even know how our own mind is related to our own brain much less how it might be related to other brains and other objects. All we can be reasonably sure about at this stage is that if psi phenomena do exist, we shall only be able to make sense of them if we abandon many of the cherished assumptions that stood us in good stead in our attempts to understand the physical world.



Emotive rather than scientific statements

Geoffrey Blundell, *Managing Director, Audio Ltd, manufacturers of ESR and other meters used by Professor Taylor in some of his experiments, also an experimenter and researcher in his own right.*

The scientific approach to the extension of our knowledge first examines the facts and only then creates a theory which will unite these facts. Usually, though, a new theory is based on an old one, and this is fine providing that one does not ignore items which fit neither the new nor the old theory. We all pay lip service to this requirement but in practice there is often considerable emotional energy invested in a 'pet' theory which makes an unbiased appraisal of awkward information difficult to achieve. This emotional energy may result from mere pressure, from a conviction that a particular approach must be correct, or more simply because of the time which has already been invested in it.

Such convictions are often very limiting and yet may perform a useful service. Such is the case with the theory that if ESP phenomena exist, then they must use energy which lies within the electromagnetic spectrum. This impeccable study has performed a very useful service in showing reasonably conclusively that such radiation is not involved.

The Russian studies which involved screened rooms, electrically shielding the 'sensitive' person also resulted in the same conclusion. There were doubts though, because it is extremely difficult to provide screening which is effective throughout the range of the electromagnetic spectrum. At the low frequency end it is difficult to avoid magnetic field penetration and at the high frequency end difficult to prevent passage of the electrical field through the inevitable tiny gaps around openings such as doors. For these reasons previous work with screened rooms was not accepted as conclusive evidence that EM energy was not involved.

There was further doubt also because living organisms do have an ability to detect weak fields e.g. direction finding by birds, and so it was not known whether or not the 'sensitive' might be detecting the inevitable residual fields in the screened room.

This study now shows that even with the most sensitive electronic equipment available today, no radiation can be detected which appears to be specific to ESP phenomena.

The study is excellent; the extrapolations from the study leave room for disagreement. It is one thing to say that the quest for 'EM concomitants of ESP is based on the deduction that it is the only known force which could conceivably be involved' and another to jump to the conclusion that 'if no EM radiation is found that this would question the reality of the phenomena'. These are emotive rather than scientific statements.

Further, because a scientific explanation can be suggested i.e. charges on the glass wall of a container, it cannot be assumed that this is the actual explanation. For example, the rotation of a compass needle was shown to be reduced by electrostatic screening. Now, I find it difficult to accept that a compass needle (in a metal case there would be further electrostatic screening) can be rotated by an electrostatic field. Even if I am wrong here, it would have been very easy to have provided a complete shielding to clarify this point.

A possible alternative explanation for the reduction of the effect by screening might be as follows: The 'sensitive' is a complex reactive being, open to suggestion as we all are. If the 'authority' figure – the scientist – suggest in any

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way (attitude, body language) that the effect is proportional to distance or may be reduced by a screening plate, then the subject is quite likely to unconsciously oblige.

Some of the conclusions appear to be logical but are not: 'dowsing can be explained as muscular activity brought about by subconscious mental activity'. Fine, but how does the subconscious get the information? The muscular twitches and dowsing rod are only the read-out device – the VDU.

Similarly, faith healing is dismissed as 'the purely psychological effect of the healer on the patient'. Our studies (C. Maxwell Cade & G. Blundell) suggest that this is only the first level of healing, albeit an absolutely essential one, but that there is far more to the phenomena than this.

Finally, in the experiment where the sensitive tried to detect the presence of GHz signal, I also tried to dowsing the result and although the results were not recorded, I achieved a fair accuracy and I think that if I did so it was because I was not over influenced by the setting and equipment. I noted John Taylor looking at me quizzically as much as to say 'you are supposed to be on the scientific side of the experiment'.



Taylor seems to evade the question . . .

Dr Ted Bastin, physicist.

Professor John Taylor and Dr Balanovski have described a series of experiments about paranormal phenomena – mostly psychokinesis (PK). Their conclusions are, in the main, negative, but what the experiments really negate are theoretical preconceptions which I shall assume to be those of Taylor.

Taylor's position seems to depend upon four assumptions, of which, he explicitly states and has given technical arguments for, the last two.

1. If PK exists, it takes place in the physical world and participates in the interactions of physical fields and matter.
2. Everything, including PK, that takes place in the world is governed by general and universally applicable laws.
3. The known laws are complete

in the sense that no others can exist.

4. Effects on the laboratory scale which act differentially on matter are electromagnetic (EM).

When Taylor had met Geller, he set himself the programme of locating the place in the EM spectrum at which PK effects must be mediated. Various people, including myself, put it to Taylor that his programme may have misassessed the evident nature of PK, and that the compulsion of the principles, which for him dictated the programme, have been misunderstood. Taylor does not mention these possibilities.

Philosophers of science nowadays are not impressed by arguments from the completeness of scientific theory, but in any case, even at a technical level, physicists have known from classical times that Taylor's argument was not logically compulsive.

A Maxwell's Demon – that is to say an intelligence capable of manipulating detail at the microscopic level – could override any universal laws. The classical physicist used the Maxwell Demon as an example of a failure in explanation, but modern theorists of the microscopic realm cannot afford to be so sweeping. They have to postulate something similar and pretty well as bad to account for the detailed re-organisation of the dispersed wave function into a discrete event at the moment when an observation takes place.

I am not much impressed by attempts on the part of some physicists who have recently written on the paranormal who argue that any microscopic reorganisation that would account for PK is justifiable on the same grounds and therefore counts positively as explanation. However, they are right negatively: the quantum theory is permissive in this way. Taylor must be aware of this argument, and that, being at a more fundamental level than his own, it cuts the ground from under his position. Yet he writes as though he were not aware of it.

What has happened to all those bits of metal that Taylor used to relish to show us, bent to the most extraordinary shapes by PK children? He was in no doubt *then* that they had been bent by PK. Now, however, he seems to evade the direct question of their reality and to content himself with a statement that no EM effects were observed. Presumably Taylor was sure that the EM effects would appear consistently and that, armed with these, he could face the sceptical world. He must have thought earlier observers very incompetent to have failed to establish these regularities.

I am far from suggesting that the courage we saw in Taylor's direct and straightforward reaction when first confronted with

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Geller bending a spoon on TV has deserted him, but something has destroyed his confidence in the evidence of his senses, and I think it must be that PK evidently didn't fit into the theoretical slot that would have allowed it to make sense for him. As a result the article reads as very, very cagey.

PK seems to be goal-directed, and to reach the goal by whatever detailed mechanism happens to be easiest. The mechanism might be EM or it might not. It might change between one observation and the next. Even if EM regularly played a part, one could have no assurance that it would be 'well-behaved'; some of the attributes of an EM interaction could appear without others.

In my opinion these familiar perplexities of PK do not place it outside scientific enquiry nor impugn its 'reality'. However, I suspect that for Taylor they do both these things.

I wonder how the authors would report PK findings that exhibited these perplexities. In particular, would their occurrence be sufficient for the authors to place the corresponding observations in category (3) of the paper ('the effect occurred in less than perfect conditions')?

I infer from the statements of policy in the paper that such effects would be so classified, and I therefore conclude that the report under review is too

'theory-laden' and does not give the information necessary to form a correct assessment of the experimental work it describes.



This negative result could easily have been anticipated

J. B. Hasted, Professor of Physics, Birkbeck College, University of London.

Balanovski and Taylor have put a lot of effort into investigating a sort of piezoelectric theory of paranormal metal-bending, and have found no evidence that electromagnetic waves emitted by a child cause the bending, which only 'occurred in less than perfect conditions'. This negative result could easily have been anticipated, because if such evidence existed, not only would the pieces of metal have oscillated

violently, with the generation of considerable heat, but also the diathermic and other physical effects on the children themselves could have been serious, even dangerous.

Surely, therefore, the effort, including the valuable cooperation from exceptional families, could have been better spent? Electrical effects are inevitably involved in normal deformations and fractures of most solids, and can be detected in paranormal metal-bending; but they are non-resonant and would not affect the high frequency receivers such as Balanovski and Taylor used. In any case, such time variations of electrical potential tell us much less about the atomic structural changes than do many other diagnostic techniques. Other investigators of metal-bending are using these, and are less interested in electromagnetic radiation.

Some reporters have misconstrued Taylor's conclusions about metal-bending, but he has summarized them clearly in this paper: 'The effect occurred in less than perfect conditions—we question its paranormal nature because we contend that electromagnetism is the only known force that could have been involved in the phenomenon'.

This 'catastrophe of belief' is a statement of an attitude perhaps more widely admitted than is generally realized. Taylor has

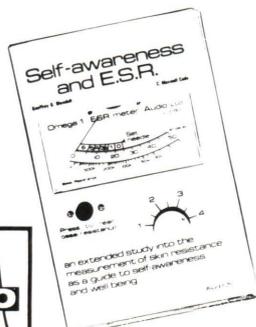
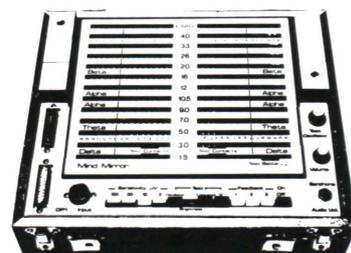
often referred to the fact that only four interactions exist, the strong, the weak, the gravitational and the electromagnetic; quite clearly the electromagnetic is by far the most likely candidate for involvement in metal-bending. Normal metal deformation must involve the rearrangement of local electromagnetic interactions; this must also be so for paranormal deformation. But one might argue that the rearrangement of atoms is also involved; does it follow that beams of atoms cause paranormal deformation? This is no more likely to be the case than it is that electromagnetic radiation causes it. It is precisely because its cause must involve some new formulation of physical laws that the phenomenon is a challenge to investigators.

I find it ironic that just at the time that Balanovski and Taylor's paper makes its appearance, I have myself become interested in the results of a new type of experiment which show that the bending of metal without touch is associated with changes of its electrical potential. (Needless to say, the deformations took place under 'less than perfect' conditions!) Currents between hand and metal do not seem to be a 'primary' part of the phenomenon, in that they will not bring about deformation; but they nevertheless merit further investigation. α

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