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Institutionalisation and the History of Psychical Research in Great Britain in the 20th Century

1 Overview: Institutions

At the turn of the 20th century, there were fluid boundaries between academic or mainstream psychology and psychical research. As scientific psychology developed and boundaries became more clearly defined, scientific psychologists for the most part became hostile towards psychical research, which came to be seen as a pseudo-science. From the 1970s onwards, post-Kuhnian developments in the philosophy of science led to explorations of the role of social factors in the demarcation of science from non-science, and work in the sociology of science focused on the role of ‘boundary work’ in the demarcation process. This produced much critical work and a recent resurgence of interest and activity in the historiography of psychical research. In considering the history of the institutionalisation of psychical research in Great Britain in the 20th century, it is useful to distinguish institutions that were linked to universities from those that were not. We shall provide a brief overview of these two categories before treating the topic chronologically.

1.1 Institutions not linked to universities

Three strands of institutions that were not linked to universities can be distinguished. The “London Dialectical Society” was set up in 1867 and a committee established in 1869, consisting mostly of professional people and including the British naturalist, explorer, geographer, anthropologist and biologist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913). It received oral and written evidence from spiritualists and mediums, including the Scotsman Daniel Dunglas Home (1833–1886), reputed to be able to levitate, to speak with the dead, and to produce rapping and knocks at will. A report was privately published in 1871 but the standard of reporting left much to be desired and is now considered largely of historical interest concerning the contemporary spiritualist scene.¹

¹ Gauld: The Founders, 84 – 85.

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In 1873, the “British National Association of Spiritualists” was formed by the English journalist and spiritualist Edmund Dawson Rogers (1823–1910). It became the “Central Association of Spiritualists”, a clique liquidated in 1883. It published the “Spiritualist”, “Spirit Notes” (1879) and “Light” (1881), the last of which is still in existence. In 1884, the Association was reformed as the “London Spiritualist Alliance”, with Rogers and the Reverend William Stainton Moses, an English clergyman and spiritualist medium, as the moving forces. Its publications included “Two Worlds” (1888), also still in existence.

By 1934 it was estimated that there were over 2,000 spiritualist societies in Britain and about 100,000 home circles. A number of regularly constituted spiritualist and psychical research societies were formed to investigate and study psychic phenomena in a scientific way but these had only a few thousand members at most.²

After World War II, the “London Spiritualist Alliance” widened its aims and was renamed as the “College of Psychic Science” in 1955, and then the “College of Psychic Studies” in 1970. It currently “offers facilities to both experienced investigators and the general public for research and intelligent discussion in the field of psychical phenomena, with particular emphasis on the evidence for survival after death and for communication from the dead.”³

The “Society for Psychical Research” (SPR) was founded in 1882 and is still in existence. It is described in detail below.

A number of institutions came into existence between the Wars. The “British College of Psychic Science” was founded in 1920 and the “International Institute for Psychical Research” in 1934. These merged to form the “Institute for Experimental Metaphysics” in 1938. Further information about these is provided in Section 3 below.

² Nelson: Spiritualism, 161.
1.2 Institutions linked to universities

- National Laboratory of Psychical Research (1926–1933)
- University of London Council for Psychical Research (1934–1938)
- Perrott-Warrick Studentship for Psychical Research (Trinity College, Cambridge) (founded in 1940)
- Blenner-Hassett Trust for Psychical Research (New College, Oxford) (founded in 1940)
- Institute of Psychophysical Research, Oxford (founded in 1967)
- Koestler Parapsychology Unit, University of Edinburgh (founded in 1985)

Table 1: Institutions linked to universities

Those institutions with links to universities are listed in Table 1. A major player in this context was Harry Price, whose work is discussed in detail below. In 1926 he opened what he called the “National Laboratory of Psychical Research”. This was succeeded by a so-called “University of London Council for Psychical Research”, in existence from 1934 to 1938.

Shortly afterwards two bequests were set up at Oxbridge Colleges. In 1940 Trinity College Cambridge established a studentship in psychical research as a result of a bequest for this purpose from Frank Duerdin Perrott (1858–1936), a barrister and former clergyman, in memory of Frederic W. H. Myers, a leading member of the SPR, who had been a Fellow of Trinity College. This bequest later became known as the “Perrott-Warrick studentship”, following a further bequest in 1956, from Frederic Walmsley Warrick (1860–1956), a manufacturing chemist. It was originally tenable for one year and many scholars in psychical research have been holders of it. In recent years, good fund management has considerably increased the amount of money available. It is now awarded for three years and is the second largest financial supporter of psychical research in Britain.

The year 1940 also saw the establishment of the “Blenner-Hassett Trust”, by Sylvia Blenner-Hassett, daughter of Frederic Myers. It was instituted for a similar

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4 Frederic William Henry Myers (1843–1901), poet, classicist, philologist, and founder of the “Society for Psychical Research”; the author of “Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death”, an extremely influential book expounding his theory of the unconscious, and co-author with Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore of “Phantasms of the Living”.

5 Studentship, 301.

6 Sheldrake: Perrott-Warrick Fund.
purpose, the funds to be under the control of the SPR and, under certain specified circumstances, to be transferable to New College, Oxford.

The 1960s saw the appointment of Dr John Beloff as a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at Edinburgh University. He was later to play a major part in securing the Koestler Parapsychology Unit for Edinburgh University in 1985. The endowment of the Koestler chair is the largest financial supporter of psychical research in the country.

In 1967 Celia Green (*1935), a British writer on philosophical scepticism, 20th century thought and psychology, and formerly Research Officer for the SPR, established the “Institute of Psychophysical Research” in Oxford. It utilised the press and radio appeals to collect data, which led to publications on lucid dreams and out of body experiences. Its main benefactor, from 1963 to 1970, was Cecil Harmsworth King (1901–1987), then Chairman of the “International Publishing Corporation”, which owned the “Daily Mirror”, and a director of the Bank of England. The Institute was later directed by Hans Eysenck⁷ and is still in existence, with the aim “to promote the advancement of knowledge by encouraging research and experimental investigation into paranormal phenomena and related mind-matter problems in the physical and biological sciences and in particular in the fields of psychology, electro-physiology and mental health.”⁸

2 The “Society for Psychical Research”

The SPR was founded at a conference of the “British National Association of Spiritualists” in 1882, at the suggestion of Sir William Barrett, professor of physics at Dublin University, who had given an account of experiments on psychical phenomena to a meeting of the “British Association for the Advancement of Science” in 1876. The leaders of the Society were Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901); Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), the Cambridge philosopher; and Edmund Gurney (1847–1888), a Quaker. Stainton Moses was also involved but later resigned.

The aim of the Society was to study paranormal phenomena, that is, “phenomena which are prima facie inexplicable on any generally recognised hypo-

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⁷ Hans Jürgen Eysenck (1916–1997), German-born psychologist who spent his professional career in England, best known for his work on intelligence and personality, although he worked in a wide range of areas within psychology. He was sympathetic to hereditarian views, as is Green.
⁸ The objectives of the Institute are described on the website of the fundraising platform “Total giving”; http://www.totalgiving.co.uk/charity/institute-of-psychophysical-research. Date of access: May 10, 2016.
thesis”, and “to approach these various problems without prejudice or prepossession of any kind, and in the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned inquiry which has enabled Science to solve so many problems”. Significantly, then as now, the Society holds no corporate opinions. Six fields of enquiry were outlined: telepathy, hypnotism, Reichenbach phenomena, hauntings and apparitions, physical phenomena (e.g. poltergeists), and the history of psychical phenomena. The Society has published “Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research” (since 1883), the “Journal of the Society for Psychical Research” (quarterly and peer-reviewed, since 1884), the “Paranormal Review” (a magazine), as well as pamphlets, leaflets, cassettes of lectures and texts of the Myers memorial lectures. It holds an annual conference, regular lectures and two study days per year.

It co-operated with societies in America, France, Germany, the Netherlands and, in the early days, Russia. Mauskopf and McVaugh offer the following assessment: The Society prides itself on careful observation and critical interpretation. It has often failed to obtain positive results but also failed to agree on what sort of investigations were most appropriate for psychical research. Although it has favoured experiments it has not actively promoted a research programme. It has had a research committee and appointed research officers but the latter coordinated material rather than carrying out research per se.

3 The inter-war period: Harry Price and the attempt to found a university department of psychical research

There was considerable activity in psychical research in the inter-war period. World War I led to an increased interest in telepathy and the possibility of survival after death, as a result of the massive number of bereavements. An examination of the relevant databases for “Nature” and “The Times” shows that occurrences of ‘psychical research’ peaked during the 1920s and 1930s; occurrences of ‘parapsychology’ peaked in the 1980s and 1990s (see Figures 1 and 2 below).

Membership of the SPR reached a peak in 1920, but by 1930 it had dropped to almost half this figure. The Society was in disarray, split by factions. There

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9 Sidgwick: Objects, 3.
10 Ibid., 4.
12 Inglis: Science and Parascience, 243.
Figure 1: Frequency of references to psychical research and parapsychology in “Nature”, 1880—2009

Figure 2: Frequency of references to psychical research and parapsychology in “The Times”, 1880—2008

was division of opinion over subject matter, methods of investigation and theoretical explanations. There were disputes about both metaphysical issues (survival vs. anti-materialism and anti-mechanism) and methodological issues (the study of spontaneous phenomena in individual cases vs. quantitative experiments on large samples). This enabled a number of rival institutions to step into the breach.

The “British College of Psychic Science” was founded in 1920 by James Hewatt McKenzie (1869–1929) and his wife Barbara,¹⁶ leading figures in spiritualist circles, to work on similar lines to the “Institut Métapsychique International” in Paris. From 1922 it published “Quarterly Transactions” which became “Psychic Science” in 1939 and then “Experimental Metaphysics” in 1945. The College had broader aims than the “London Spiritualist Alliance” at the time, in providing a centre for information, advice and guidance, where psychic mediums of good reputation could be consulted and where scientific research into psychic phenomena could be conducted. Its members felt that the SPR was failing in its duty and wanted to encourage the study of mediums. It had three departments of work: instruction, demonstrations and research. Although eclectic in spirit, it favoured “a human and practical approach rather than a cold and often negative scientific attitude”;¹⁵ and most of the reports in its journal, “Psychic Science”, relied on personal experiences and anecdotal evidence.

In 1934 the “International Institute for Psychical Research” was established, also spiritualist in inspiration whilst claiming to be scientific. Although it was initially supported by reputable scientists, including the biologist Julian Huxley, they resigned after a few months when its survivalist leanings became clear. It was led by the spiritualist Nandor Fodor¹⁶ as research officer until 1938, when it merged with the “British College of Psychic Science” to form the “Institute for Experimental Metaphysics”. During World War II it languished, finally closing in 1947. Its library and records were either dispersed or destroyed.

A major figure who took advantage of the disarray in the SPR in the inter-war period was the amateur psychical researcher and businessman Harry Price (1881–1948). Defensive about his working-class origins, Price sought academic

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¹⁴ The McKenzies were both originally from Scottish devout Christian families but came to London and converted to spiritualism. Hewatt became a businessman but was an ardent spiritualist with a particular interest in physical mediums and trance mediumship, of which he carried out a number of investigations.

¹⁵ Amalgamation, 174.

¹⁶ Nandor Fodor (1895–1964), Hungarian who worked in New York and London as a journalist. A leading authority on poltergeists, hauntings and mediumship, he later adopted a psycho-analytic approach to these phenomena. See also the paper of Júlia Gyimesi in this volume.
recognition. His lifelong passion was psychical research, to which he devoted an enormous amount of energy and finances but his approach and values were those of a businessman rather than a scientist. He craved fame and publicity, and was prepared to sacrifice truth and integrity in pursuit of them if necessary. As Renée Haynes,¹ a British novelist and somewhat uncritical psychical researcher, put it: “He combined an infinite capacity for drama with a great talent for, and addiction to, publicity, sometimes of a ridiculous kind.”¹⁸ There was a vaudeville atmosphere to his sensationalistic studies. Although a lifelong member of the SPR, which he joined in 1920, the two were at daggers drawn.

Price founded the “National Laboratory of Psychical Research” in 1926 “to investigate in a dispassionate manner and by purely scientific means, every phase of psychic or alleged psychic phenomena” and “to provide facilities for experimentation”.¹⁹ Several of the world’s leading parapsychologists were on its Council, including Albert Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929), a physician, psychiatrist and psychical researcher from Munich, who studied mediumship, hypnotism and telepathy; Fritz Grunewald (1885–1925), an engineer and psychical researcher in Berlin; Eugène Osty (1874–1938), a doctor and director of the “Institut Métapsychique International” in Paris; René Sudre (1880–1968), a scientific writer who made contributions to experimental and theoretical parapsychology, also in Paris; and Christian Winther (1873–1968), a psychical researcher and president of the Danish SPR in Copenhagen. Lord Sands, a distinguished Scottish judge, was appointed president and provided financial support. The psychologists William Brown,²⁰ William McDougall²¹ and J. C. Flügel²² were members of a “London group available for participating in experimental work”²³ and Flügel was on its board. Members of the public paid a membership fee of one guinea (£1.05 in modern currency), for which they received copies of the Laboratory’s publications. Honorary membership entitled people to use the Laboratory and participate in séances; lectures were also organised. Within a very short time

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¹ Renée Oriana Haynes (1906–1994), member of the SPR and editor of its journal.
² Haynes: The Society, 146.
¹⁹ Price: Regurgitation, end papers.
²⁰ William Brown (1881 – 1952), British physician, psychologist and psychotherapist.
²¹ William McDougall (1871–1938), influential British psychologist, who worked first in England, later emigrating to the United States, where he developed work on parapsychology at Duke University. He was president of both the American and the British SPR.
²² John Carl Flügel (1884–1955), psychologist and psychoanalyst, was an important figure in British psychology in the inter-war years, playing key roles in both the psychoanalytic movement and the “British Psychological Society”.
²³ Price: Regurgitation, end papers.
the membership of the Laboratory topped the 800-mark, rivalling that of the SPR.Quite a number of people were members of both organisations.

Between 1926 and 1932 the Laboratory carried out series of sittings with (mostly physical) mediums, including Rudi Schneider (1908–1957), a well-known Austrian physical medium, the subject of many experimental investigations, and the Scotswoman Helen Duncan. Price aimed to appeal to both scientists and the lay public: “It has always been the policy of the Laboratory to invite both the Press and official science to our tests”. Initially, ‘experimental’ séances to which scientists were invited alternated with ‘demonstrations’ for ‘interested others’. Reporters from several national newspapers and a representative from the British Broadcasting Corporation attended some of the séances; and articles were submitted to other newspapers. Publications included the bi-monthly journal, the “British Journal of Psychical Research” (articles were also submitted to the “Revue Métapsychique” and the “Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie”), “Bulletins” and “Proceedings” of the Laboratory and its successor, the “University of London Council for Psychical Research” (see below), about 18 books and newspaper articles. Price’s efforts were hailed as truly scientific by newspapers all over the world.

Mauskopf and McVaugh suggest that Price’s organisation was far more important than others in the English scene because he was able to enlist academics’ support on a continuing basis. The Laboratory remained a perennial thorn in the flesh of the SPR because Price noisily publicized it as a society that would offer a progressive alternative to the older institution, one that would actively and aggressively investigate all phenomena, including the physical and the overtly spiritualistic. It thus attracted a peculiar mixture of supporters, ranging from those spiritualists who were outraged at what they considered the excessive conservatism and scepticism of the SPR to critics like S. G. Soal who were scornful of what they viewed as its unscientific and overcredulous position on mental phenomena [...] his obvious ambition to dominate psychical research and his knack for self-advertisement were by themselves enough to earn him the distrust and suspicion of the SPR.

When the lease of his building was about to expire, Price attempted to develop collaborative links with a number of institutions. He first approached the “Lon-

24 Randall: Harry Price, 163.
25 Victoria Helen McCrae Duncan (1897–1956), Scottish medium, whose main demonstration was to produce ectoplasm, which turned out to be regurgitated cheesecloth. She was convicted of fraud on several occasions.
26 Price: Rudi Schneider, 19.
27 Mauskopf/McVaugh: The Elusive Science, 211.
don Spiritualist Alliance” and the “Institut Métapsychique International” in 1929. The following year, he approached the “British College of Psychic Science” and the SPR. His offer to merge his laboratory with the latter was rejected out of hand by the leadership but approved by many of the society’s members. None of these approaches came to fruition. Failing to link up with a society, Price turned to academics.

In 1933 he made a formal offer to the University of London to found a Department of Psychical Research. The offer included his laboratory and library (an extensive collection of books including many rarities on psychical research) and a guaranteed income of £500 per annum. The proposal was considered by various boards and committees of the University. Despite misgivings in some quarters, on January 3rd 1934, the University of London pronounced psychical research to be “a fit subject of university study and research”. However, space and financial limitations prevented its implementation in practice. Mauskopf and McVaugh suggest that Price’s plans constituted a threat to the University’s resources and reputation.

Despite this, Price managed to organise a so-called “University of London Council for Psychical Investigation” (ULCPI) in 1934. It consisted of ten academics: four psychologists (J. C. Flügel, Cyril Burt, C. Alec Mace, Francis Aveling), three philosophers, one physicist, one physician and one mathematician. The Council undertook to supervise the work of the Laboratory and to direct students in psychical research for higher degrees.

For a while Price succeeded in engaging both mainstream scientists and the general public, by cultivating academics and courting journalists, such as the editors of “Nature”, “The Listener” and the “Daily Mail”. He advertised widely, e. g. in the spiritualist journal “Two Worlds” as well as in “Nature”.

During this time he transferred his assets to the University. His library, having been rejected by the SPR, was handed over in November 1936. The Council did not live up to its promise. Price’s behaviour upset several of his Council members on account of his disregard for scientific integrity, his seeking of press publicity and his failure to consult them before going ahead on such matters. On occasions, he appeared to have intentionally tricked his colleagues, cited others’ work without their consent, claimed sole credit for collective achievements, and lied to participants being tested. In 1938 the Council was disbanded.

28 Price: Search for Truth, 105.
29 Mauskopf/McVaugh: The Elusive Science, 212.
So ultimately the attempt to link psychical research with universities failed; the SPR was left to carry on research.³⁰

Another major player at this time was Samuel Soal (1889–1975), a mathematics lecturer at Queen Mary College, University of London. He became interested in psychical research and worked with both the SPR and Harry Price. He prided himself on being a scientist. In 1934 he attempted to replicate Rhine’s card-guessing experiments on ESP (extrasensory perception), first at the “National Laboratory of Psychical Research” and then at University College London. He used radio and “John O’London’s Weekly” to publicise his work. By 1938, he had tested over 100 participants but found no trace of supernormal ability in 12,425 guesses.³¹ The upshot was that people became disenchanted with card-guessing experiments. Most SPR members found card-guessing dull, trivial and irrelevant. Soal had become convinced of the futility of experimental searches for telepathy and clairvoyance. In September 1938, Queen Mary College was evacuated to Cambridge, where Soal met the British parapsychologist Whately Carington (1892–1947), who persuaded him to look for displacement effects (success on trials immediately preceding or following the critical ones). He found these in two of his participants, Gloria Stewart, a housewife, and Basil Shackleton, a celebrated London portrait photographer.³² Soal and Mollie Goldney³³ carried on experiments with Stewart and Shackleton on precognition between 1941 and 1943.

However, subsequent work has shown Soal to have been guilty of fraud in his experimental work³⁴ and that he frequently behaved in a devious manner. Indeed, he shared many characteristics with Harry Price. He was self-conscious about his lack of a higher degree, ambitious and duplicitous, and had an uneasy relation with the SPR.

4 John Beloff and the “Koestler Parapsychology Unit” at the University of Edinburgh

Dr John Beloff (1920–2006) was appointed lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Edinburgh in 1962. One of his main interests was

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³⁰ Ibid., 215.
³¹ Soal: Fresh Light, 152.
³² Carington/Soal: Experiments.
³³ Kathleen Mary Goldney (1894–1992), a midwife who became an active psychical researcher. She worked with Harry Price and was an officer of the SPR.
³⁴ Hansel: The Search; Markwick: The Soal-Goldney Experiments; Markwick: Establishment of Data Manipulation.
psychical research. He supervised a number of self-funded postgraduate students in this area here. Described as a “scientist who put parapsychology on the academic map”\(^{35}\) and as “Britain’s pre-eminent parapsychologist, an academic who did more than anyone to establish the study of paranormal phenomena as a legitimate academic pursuit”,\(^{36}\) Susan Blackmore\(^{37}\) praised him for his “steady and intelligent handling of this ever-controversial subject”.\(^{38}\) As mentioned above, he was instrumental in acquiring the “Koestler Parapsychology Unit” for the University of Edinburgh.

During the final years of his life, Arthur Koestler\(^{39}\) (with Brian Inglis\(^{40}\) and Tony Bloomfield\(^{41}\)) established the “KIB Society” (KIB being their initials) to sponsor research “outside the scientific orthodoxies”, which after his death in 1983 was renamed the “Koestler Foundation”. Arthur and Cynthia Koestler bequeathed the residue of their estate (about £1 million) for the foundation of a chair in parapsychology at a British university. The trustees of the estate had great difficulty finding a university willing to establish such a chair. Oxford, Cambridge, King’s College London and University College London were approached and all refused. Eventually, the trustees reached an agreement with Edinburgh University to set up a chair in accordance with Koestler’s bequest. The first Koestler Professor of Parapsychology was the American, Robert Morris,\(^{42}\) appointed in 1985 and serving until his death in 2004. Morris recruited additional staff and research students to form the Koestler Parapsychology Unit. Over two decades he supervised about 100 undergraduate and 30 postgraduate projects. He also served as president of the Psychology Section of the “British Association for the Advancement of Science”, thus integrating parapsychology with the wider academic community.

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\(^{35}\) Braude: John Beloff, 31.

\(^{36}\) Blackmore: John Beloff, 68.

\(^{37}\) Susan Blackmore (*1951), British writer, lecturer and broadcaster on psychology and the paranormal; formerly a parapsychologist, now a sceptic.

\(^{38}\) Blackmore: John Beloff, 68.

\(^{39}\) Arthur Koestler (1905–1983), much travelled Austrian-Hungarian author and journalist, particularly on European political issues. He resided in England for the last part of his life.

\(^{40}\) Brian Inglis (1916–1993), Irish journalist, historian and television presenter; somewhat un-critical in his treatment of psychical research.

\(^{41}\) Instone Bloomfield (1911–1989), former property developer; benefactor of spiritualist endeavours and psychical research including the SPR.

\(^{42}\) Robert L. Morris (1942–2004), American psychologist, who worked at the “Rhine Research Center”; president of the “Parapsychological Association” and an officer of several other learned societies.
5 The current situation

The current situation is that, rather than large institutions, there are research groups affiliated to universities. There has also been another change in nomenclature, so that rather than ‘psychical research’ or ‘parapsychology’, the label ‘anomalous experience’ is often used, indicating espousal of a more neutral approach and a lack of ontological commitment. For example, much of the work of the “Anomalous Psychology Research Group” at Goldsmiths’, University of London, is in the spirit of Joseph Jastrow and the psychology of deception, investigating how people come to believe in paranormal phenomena. Current research groups are listed in Table 2.

- Koestler Parapsychology Unit, University of Edinburgh
- Centre for the Study of Anomalous Processes, University of Northampton
- Anomalous Psychology Research Unit, Goldsmiths’ University of London
- Anomalous Experience Research Unit, Department of Sociology, University of York
- Psychology of Paranormal Phenomena Group, University of Derby

Table 2: Current research groups

Other universities where there is or has been activity in parapsychology are the University of Coventry, the University of Hertfordshire, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moores University and Cambridge University.

6 Summary and research questions

I should like to preface this section by querying the assumption of a process of institutionalisation. As I indicated above (in the previous section), in Britain there have been societies and research groups rather than major institutions engaged in psychical research.

Concerning the main historical episodes and conjunctures in the process of institutionalisation of paranormal research, I would suggest there have been changes in the research paradigms. The subject of study has shifted in approximately the following sequence: spontaneous phenomena → physical mediums → card guessing experiments (consonant with the change of nomenclature from psychical research to parapsychology) → gifted PK (psychokinetic) subjects
(e.g. Uri Geller)\(^4\) physiological measures, remote viewing, Ganzfeld experiments, prediction of random events → the metaphysically more neutral study of anomalous phenomena.

Looking at the topic from a transnational perspective, my impression is that many of these intersections and differences have a transnational element. This is largely due to the fact that international collaboration has always been a feature of psychical research. A goal and achievement of the SPR was the formation of other societies. International congresses played an important role in the early years. The SPR has had American, French and German presidents. Several foreign representatives served on the council of Harry Price’s Laboratory, although his later attempts at collaboration met with rejection.

With regard to major actors and driving forces, it is difficult to single out individuals as many people played a part. However, Harry Price and Samuel Soal played an important role. Unfortunately, both were found to be fraudulent, at least at times. Two others of greater integrity were John Beloff and Arthur Koestler. The latter left a substantial financial legacy.

A major demarcation and conflict persisting through the history of psychical research is the tension between orthodox science and psychical research, or between orthodox science and spiritualism. Wolffram, in discussing psychical research in Imperial and inter-war Germany, suggests it is a border science between psychology and occultism.\(^44\) Eleanor Sidgwick, principal of Newnham College, Cambridge delayed joining the SPR because she feared it might endanger the College’s reputation. The attitude of the broad middle ground of experimental psychologists is that positive results are needed to pursue the topic. Although psychical research still had potentially a much broader base of support in academic orthodoxy in Britain than in America in the 1930s,\(^45\) nevertheless the University of London ultimately declined the offer to create a department for its study. Deborah Delanoy, a recent president of the SPR, is reported\(^46\) as saying that parapsychologists are accepted in Britain because they work in psychology departments and engage in orthodox research as well, to increase credibility.

Funding in Britain has been predominantly private. All media resources have been used: academic and popular publications, the national press, radio and television. The institutions that succeeded were those that managed to appeal to a wide range of constituencies. The SPR has always encompassed a wide spectrum

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\(^4\) Uri Geller (*1946), Israeli magician, television personality, and self-proclaimed psychic, known for his demonstrations of spoon bending.

\(^44\) Wolffram: The Stepchildren of Science.

\(^45\) Mauskopf/McVaugh: The Elusive Science, 211.

\(^46\) Odling-Smee: The Lab, 11.
of opinion and significantly does not hold corporate views. Harry Price was explicitly committed to engaging both scientists and the general population; he was continually involved in a balancing act to appeal to both constituencies. His laboratory, equipment and elaborate method of control designed to eliminate fraud were hallmarks of science. On the other hand, his publications in the popular press were aimed at gaining the support (financial and otherwise) of the general public, including spiritualists. Possibly the most significant reason for the cooperation of academic psychologists with him was their mutual position poised between scientific and popular psychology.

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