

# The Society for Psychical Research (SPR)

The Society for Psychical Research (SPR) is a non-profit organization in the United Kingdom whose purpose is to research and investigate supernatural, magical, paranormal, and occult phenomena in a scientific and unbiased manner. It was founded in 1882 by three dons of Trinity College, Cambridge, Edmund Gurney, Frederic William Henry Myers, and Henry Sidgwick, because of their interest in spiritualism.

The Society has a membership of 5,500 and an average revenue of 5.2 million pounds per year. Its headquarters is in Marloes Road, London.

The Society holds no corporate opinions: all opinions expressed are those of the individual members. It publishes the quarterly Journal of The Society for Psychical Research (JSPR) and irregular Proceedings, and holds an annual conference.

Its purpose was to encourage scientific research into psychic or paranormal phenomena in order to establish their truth. Research was initially aimed at six areas:

- telepathy,
- mesmerism and similar phenomena,
- mediums,
- apparitions,
- physical phenomena associated with séances and, finally,
- the history of all these phenomena.

The Society is run by a President and a Council of twenty people. The organisation is divided between London and Cambridge, the London headquarters were initially at 14 Dean's Yard. A French branch of the Society was formed in 1885 as the Société Française pour Recherche Psychique (SFRP), which means "French Society for Psychical Research". Later, an American branch of the Society was formed as the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), becoming an affiliate of the original SPR in 1890.

Famous supporters of the society have included Alfred Lord Tennyson, Mark Twain, Lewis Carroll, Carl Jung, J. B. Rhine and Arthur Conan Doyle (who was shamefully duped on at least one occasion by tricksters).

The Society was especially active in the thirty years after it was founded, gaining fame for the Hodgson Report in 1884.

Most initial members were spiritualists but there was a core of 'professional' investigators - the Sidgwick Group, headed by Henry Sidgwick, a formation pre-dating the SPR by eight years.

The Society was weakened by internal strife, a large part of the members (the Spiritists) left as early as 1887 in opposition to the non-spiritualist approach taken by most intellectuals.

The Society still exists and states its principal aim as "understanding events and abilities commonly described as 'psychic' or 'paranormal' by promoting and supporting important research in this area." Of its initial aims, the most successful has been the gathering of data relating to the history of the paranormal - the SPR has built up an extensive library

and archive, part of which is held at the University of Cambridge. The Journal is peer reviewed and respected in the field of parapsychology.

The Society still has many well known figures among its members, including parapsychologists Susan Blackmore, Ciarán O'Keeffe, and Louie Savva. Investigators of spontaneous phenomena (hauntings, etc.) include Maurice Grosse and Guy Lyon Playfair who are best known for the Enfield Poltergeist.