

Archie Roy (1924-2012)

Archie E. Roy was a renowned astronomer and psychical researcher. At the time of his death, he was professor emeritus of astronomy and honorary research fellow in the University of Glasgow. He served as president of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) (1993-95) and was founder of the Scottish Society for Psychical Research. Over a 30-year period, he investigated many paranormal cases, and he authored three books on paranormal subjects – *A Sense of Something Strange* (1990), *The Archives of the Mind* (1996) and *The Eager Dead* (2008).

“The genial Professor Emeritus of Astronomy at Glasgow University has been watching the heavens for most of his life, wondering if there is life on other planets,” wrote Lorn Macintyre of *The Glasgow Herald* on February 10, 1997. “But he has had a parallel fascination investigating the greatest unsolved mystery in the history of mankind. Is there an invisible world to which we journey after death?”¹



After receiving his B.Sc. from Glasgow University in 1950, Roy earned his Ph.D. in 1954. He then spent four years as a science master in Shawlands Academy before returning to Glasgow University as a lecturer in the Department of Astronomy. He was made a full professor in 1977. In

addition to the SPR affiliation, he was a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Institute of Physics, the Royal Astronomical Society, the British Interplanetary Society, and the International Astronomical Union, the latter of which honored him for his work in astronomy by naming an asteroid after him.

In a 2008 interview, Roy recalled that his introduction to psychical research took place soon after joining the faculty at Glasgow University. “I lost my way in the old university library and found shelves of books on spiritualism and psychical research,” he explained. “My first ignorant reaction was ‘What is this rubbish doing in a university library?’ But curiosity made me open some of the books. I was surprised to recognize some of the authors of this ‘rubbish,’ such as Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor William James, Professor Sir William Crookes, and so on. My balloon of ignorance was punctured by the needle of my scientific curiosity and I found myself called up to a new career.”²

Most of Roy’s investigations involved hauntings, fear of hauntings, apparitions, and possession or obsession. “They often originated as cries for help from people convinced that they or their homes were haunted,” he said. “Some cases were found to be non-paranormal, for instance as imaginative misinterpretations of unusual noises – the peremptory knocking of a water-hammer, or sadly, mental trouble. But some did involve paranormal phenomena. Some were poltergeist cases, others were apparitional and some were mixed. In some we found evidence of intrusion from the other side of death, of ‘unfinished business,’ of maliciousness, of a wish to dominate. In some we could identify the problem and even take

measures to solve it, operating not so much as psychical researchers but more akin to psychical plumbers! Hopefully we learned from every case but our prime concern in each was to help the unhappy family who called us in.”³

When asked if any one investigation stood out in his mind, Roy recalled the Maxwell Park poltergeist case, which began in 1972 and in which he collaborated with the Rev. Max Magee, chaplain to the students of Strathclyde University. “The family members were terrified by the physical manifestations that tormented them,” Roy remembered. “When they fled to a relative’s house, the phenomena did likewise and even continued there after the family, in despair, returned to their own house, as though in some way the relative’s family had been infected. In time some fifty people were witnesses, including cynical journalists, town councilors, doctors, policemen and others, and they turned from original scepticism to utter conviction that they had witnessed the paranormal. A police officer told me, ‘You know, I had to take some of my men off that case. They were turning in reports like ‘The bed was proceeding in a northerly direction.’”

Roy further recalled that the phenomena included alarming noises, fires breaking out, floods of water, psychokinetic movements of a wide variety of objects, many seemingly perpetrated by malicious intent. “It became clear to Max and I that there were attempts to control the two boys – at times they carried out feats of strength or skills that they could not possibly have acquired normally. We found it necessary over many months to, turn about, stay until late at night to support the family who were losing weight, exhibiting extreme stress bringing them to the edge of complete nervous breakdowns. Finally Max, in his capacity as a minister of religion, aided by myself, persuaded the family one Sunday evening to go to church. While they were there, Max and I went through the house room by room, carrying out a service of ‘cleansing’ in each.”

When the poltergeist phenomena ceased, Roy continued, the boys no longer exhibited symptoms of possession and the family’s lives were transformed, but, at the same time, the man downstairs, with whom the family had been having a vendetta for years, died. “In addition we persuaded the father to send the older boy, who seemed the main focus, up north to stay with his grandparents for some weeks. So we were unable to achieve a complete understanding as to why the phenomena ceased. But we did learn a lot, perhaps the most important being that if you embark upon such an investigation, you must sign on for the duration, for a family in the middle of the poltergeist hurricane desperately needs support, sympathy and to be led to understand that these cases have happened innumerable times, but like an illness, will run their course, exhibit their symptoms and some day, hopefully, we will be able to do more than simply offer moral support.”⁴

Roy played a small part in the famous Scoble investigation, the primary researchers being Professor Arthur Ellison, Professor David Fontana and Montague Keen. “I was taken to the Scoble site on one occasion, not because of a lack of interest on my part but purely because of distance,” he related. “Nevertheless every time I met Monty (Keen) he kept me informed about events at the circle. On the evening I was present I sat where I could satisfactorily see and hear what was happening. The conversation between the experimenters and the mediums’ controls was fascinating. The proceedings became even more interesting to me when the ‘control’ known as the scientist spoke to me, welcoming me and saying that he had carried out some of the pioneering work of calculating periodic orbits of planets and satellites. He discussed with me some of the technicalities and difficulties he had experienced and referred to the fact that in his day there were no computers such as I could now use. Afterwards I realised that there were only about a score of people in the UK who would have been able to

have a conversation with me at that level of expertise on that subject. And as far as I know, the mediums had not been given my identity and profession. I also realised that the scientist bore quite a resemblance to George Darwin, related to Charles Darwin, who had indeed carried out such pioneering calculations on periodic orbits. But again, as seems to happen to many circles that terminate unexpectedly, the Scole circle did likewise on the grounds that it had to cease because its operation was interfering with the ability of time-travelers to pass from one galaxy to another! As we say laconically in Glasgow when our bog-gle-factor is surpassed: 'Aye, that'll be right.'"⁵

Roy was especially interested in the famous cross-correspondences, considered by many to be the best evidence ever of survival, and wrote about the key cases in *The Eager Dead*. "I well remember the first visit Monty Keen and I made to Honiton to meet Lady Alison Kremer, granddaughter of Gerald, 2nd Earl of Balfour," he said. "She had been left the large archive of documents collected by her mother Jean, Countess of Balfour, who had added to them from 1930 onwards, when the Sidgwick Group appointed her their official archivist of anything related to the Cross-Correspondences. Very little of this archive had ever been published and I could see why. After a preliminary study of the archive I knew I had to accept Lady Kremer's invitation to prepare it for publication. I also knew it would be a long and formidable task assessing the material, ordering it in importance, balancing it and bringing into a more readable form the scores of letters, memoranda, hundreds of automatic writings, considered and confidential opinions of Gerald, his sister Mrs. Sidgwick, Sir Oliver Lodge, Mr. Piddington and others, as well as the part played by Arthur Balfour, Prime Minister in the first decade of the 20th century. And from behind the curtain of death, so to speak, came compelling evidence in the archive that the group of seven, Myers, Gurney, Sidgwick, William Balfour, Edith Lyttelton, Annie Marshall and Mary Catherine

Lyttelton, still existed, still had an astounding agenda to be pursued, the Story and the Plan."⁶

It took considerable patience, Roy recalled, to sort out the cross-correspondences. He recalled Monty Keen likening it to an assault on the north face of the Eiger. "In fact it took almost 10 years, studying the material, doing additional research to check data, writing successive drafts and persuading numerous colleagues to read and criticise them, revising and cutting down the length, finding a publisher and collaborating with Book Guild over many months in producing the book – they did a marvelous job."⁷

The most difficult part, he added, was cutting out innumerable parts of the material concerning fascinating events in the Victorian era and the 20th century and little-known items of real interest regarding real people.

"Essentially, the cross-correspondences originated in a deceptively-simple idea," Roy continued. "Someone who has died transmits to a number of mediums or automatists scattered round the world snippets of a theme dreamed up by him. The snippets received by any one automatist do not make any sense whatever to him or her. Only by bringing all the snippets together does the theme become clear. Moreover, that theme is characteristic of the intelligence and learning and personality of the sender who even, when he finds the group of investigators having serious difficulties in interpreting the collected snippets, speaks through the scripts directly to them, chiding and teasing them in the manner of a kindly teacher with an obtuse class. He then gives hints to them to aid them in their interpretation of the scripts.

"The difficulties really begin to mount when we realise that the group of seven on the other side of death had a decidedly complicated agenda. They continued to 'dictate' scripts for over thirty years. They, especially [Frederic] Myers, cleverly used levels of classical allusions and literary references that to very few modern people

make any sense at all, so philistine have our educational standards become.”⁸

Had Roy come to any conclusion about survival, or was he, like so many others, a fence sitter? “To me, at the present time, the evidence for the survival of bodily death is of such strength that it is the most parsimonious theory accounting for much more than any other,” he responded. “Even the file theory, which supposes that throughout a person’s life a record of that person’s life from their point of view is made until their bodily death, is not so convincing. Certainly the file cannot be supposed to be physical, for long after the death of the brain. Children recall the details of a previous life, accepting it as a former life they had, since memories of that life are recalled from the point of view of the former person. To me the researches of Stevenson and Haraldsson are convincing in this area that survival of death in some way takes place. Possession cases such as those of Lurancy Vennum, Uttara Huddar, Sumitra, Jasbir Lal Jat add strength to that concept. Certain ‘drop in’ cases also strengthen the concept.

“Indeed the wide variety of such cases are so evidentially strong that they support a challenge I made in print twelve years ago to any sceptic that if she or he believes no proof of a paranormal event has ever been produced they should submit in detail normal explanations for the long list of cases I gave. The silence from the sceptics has been deafening, a silence that reminds me of Sherlock Holmes’ chiding of Dr. Watson because of his non-appreciation of the significance of the dog that did *not* bark in the night. Or the trick of young children who, displeased with the real world, close their eyes and believe that by so doing, they have cancelled that displeasing world. Or the late Sam Goldwyn who allegedly shouted, “Don’t confuse me with facts! My mind is made up!”⁹

References

- Holt, Henry, *On the Cosmic Relations*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1914
- Murphy, Gardner, and Ballou, Robert, *William James on Psychological Research*, The Viking Press, 1960
- Pleasants, Helene, *Biographical Dictionary of Parapsychology*, Garrett Publications, New York, 1964.
- <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/people/1800s/newbold>

¹ Roy, Archie, *The Archives of the Mind*, SNU Publications, 1996, front piece.

² Tymn, Michael E., *The Searchlight*, Academy of Spirituality and Paranormal Studies, June 2008.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

⁹ *ibid*