

BORLEY RECTORY AND THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

(Dissection of the Technique of “Exposing”)

by

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“It is true that mental resistance to belief in the reality  
of these phenomena is very great, and rightly so...

“...In this field every statement is considered dubious; the  
good faith of the experimenters is impugned and, if their  
honesty be grudgingly accepted, then their competence  
is doubted and attacks made on them which sometimes  
almost reduces them in the eyes of their critics to the  
level of imbeciles.”

Dr. Eric J. Dingwall,  
Tomorrow, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 512.

Specimen Chapter, Draft of Reply  
to  
“THE HAUNTING OF BORLEY RECTORY”

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Of “Borley Rectory” (England’s “Most Haunted House”),

Sir Ernest Jelf (Senior Master of the Supreme Court of England, and King’s Remembrancer) in 1941 said: “After making every allowance for what we have said about witnesses not coming up to their proofs and so forth, a very strong case has undoubtedly been put forward, and we are at a loss to understand what cross-examination could possibly shake it.”

Sir Albion Richardson, K.C., C.B.E., (Recorder of Nottingham, former M.P. for Peckham) in 194- said: “Borley Rectory stands by itself in the literature of psychical manifestation... Mr Price sets out to prove by the cumulative evidence of eye-witnesses--recorded in a form which would be admissible in evidence in any court of law---the happening of events at Borley Rectory which it is impossible to explain by the operation of natural law... The evidence which he has collected of the phenomena which appeared there is as conclusive as human testimony can ever be... I have not met anyone...(and it is mainly with legal, friends of long experience in the weighing and sifting of evidence that I have discussed it) who has not been satisfied that the manifestations...disclosed are proved by the evidence, to the point of moral certainty.”

The End of Borley Rectory, Harry Price,  
pp.323-325.

## THE “S.P.R. ENQUIRY” AND THE POLISH INVESTIGATION

The design by which the authors of HBR set about manufacturing their charges is fully exposed in their discussion of the “Polish investigation” at Borley Rectory, HBR, pp. 148-50. (See “Lieutenant Nawrocki’s report,” describing experiences of the six witnesses, EBR, pp. 69-70.) No subtlety is lost on their unabashed desire to see the evidence laughed out of court: “Frankly, we cannot take this account seriously and we can only imagine it to have been based upon an elaborate hoax of some sort,” HBR, p. 148.

It is a commentary upon the current trend towards irresponsibility in Parapsychology, that the authors do not feel obligated to tell their readers just what sort of “hoax” their imagination suggests. One would surmise that Harry Price would be their first choice for culprit, except that (as will be seen) the critics declare he himself was not happy with the suspected testimony. It is, moreover, a pity that, while proclaiming this suspicion, the authors thought it necessary to suppress the highly relevant and contrariwise facts that (a) Harry Price states that Lt. Nawrocki wrote to him from “45 William Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife;” and (b) he was “attached to the Polish Army Medical Corps” (EBR, p. 68); (c) being accompanied on his visit(s) to the Rectory by other named officers of the Polish Army, including “Colonel J. Wroblewski, O.C. Polish Signal Training Centre.” Whether these “S.P.R. enquirers” were content to sit upon their suspicions and enjoy the “hoax,” or were industrious enough to chase down these clues and leads in 1949, is another public mystery. (One would assume that a few judicious questions, properly directed by an “S.P.R. enquiry,” could have discovered the status or whereabouts of these parties. It is true that HBR states these officers were then “temporarily stationed in England,” although neither the account nor Price himself makes this assertion, so, perhaps after all, the enquirers have determined that the Polish investigators were not born in Harry Price’s inkwell.)

Nothing is so dissuasive as the preposterous boasts of a hoaxer; the more improbable his claims, the less they are received. So, abetted by distortion, manipulation, and wholesale suppression of the facts here necessary for proper judgement, the authors industriously contrive a number of objections to show the absurdity and singular disorder of Lt. Nawrocki's report.

I. They object that "during a prolonged period when merely faint and occasional 'manifestations,' if any, were being reported, and when visits of the 'Cambridge Commission' on 22 June and 16-17 July 1943 produced no results of any kind at all (EBR, p. 163),"...

II. ... "the Polish party obtained on 28 June and 28 July a cross-section of virtually the whole of the more sensational traditional phenomena,"...

III. ... "Lieut. Nawrocki even apparently suggesting that he saw the nun on both occasions!"

IV. To which, the critics add; "As we have previously shown, this apparition had not been claimed to have been seen by anybody since the Bull incumbencies with the exceptions of the very dubious experiences of Mrs Lloyd Williams in 1938 (see p. 126), and Miss Rosemary Williams in 1939 (see p. 147), whose stories imply that they saw the nun."

V. "Further, despite Mr. S. H. Glanville's statement to one of us (THH) that no voices were heard at all during the official observer period, Lieut. Nawrocki heard whisperings in the kitchen passage."

VI. "This gentleman even saw What he imagined might be the ghost of Harry Bull, previously seen by nobody but Mrs Foyster of whose experience Price said (EBR, p. 48): 'The phantasm was, I think, a subjective one, as no one else saw it,' and added (EBR, p. 71): 'Personally, I doubt whether the ghost of Harry Bull has ever been seen at the Rectory.'"

VII. "Finally, stone-throwing was experienced which had never previously occurred

except on those occasions when either Marianne Foyster or Harry Price was at Borley.”

VIII. “Perhaps the most disturbing feature of the report, however, is the statement that on the night of 28 July it was decided to spend the night in the ruins and for this purpose the floor of the Blue Room was rebuilt in the space of an hour (EBR, p. 70). Even Price seems to have been mildly unhappy about this, for he says that the party I showed considerable improvisation when they “rebuilt” the floor of the Blue Room, erected seats and a table, etc. In order to examine the upper floor of the house, they must have laid planks across the rafters on which to walk’ (EBR, p. 71). Perhaps he was thinking a little uneasily of what he had said about the Blue Room when discussing Miss Rosemary Williams’s ghost story in 1939 and the impossibility of a human being reaching the Blue Room window. For he then said (MHH, p. 177): ‘No human being could have climbed up to that window under the existing conditions. When I visited Borley on March 28, 29, and 30, 1939, I tried to reach the burnt-through rafters by climbing over the debris, but I could not reach the Blue Room window aperture, because, as Miss Williams emphasizes, there was nothing to stand on, and with every step I took I was afraid of being precipitated into the rooms below...’”

## I.

Taking these criticisms in order, we have seen the great contrast the authors have endeavored to draw between the experiences reported by Lt. Nawrocki and the “visits of the ‘Cambridge Commission’ on 22 June and 16-17 July 1943 [which allegedly] produced no results of any kind...” HBR, p. 148. Now, as the time devoted to experimentation (or observation) is generally a principal factor contributing to any positive results in research<sup>1</sup> and as the authors have

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Price wrote of the demand ghost-hunting puts upon the investigator’s patience: Occasionally a friend would call at the Rectory to see whether anything was occurring there. He would stay a short while and would probably see nothing... One cannot, I am afraid, walk into a haunted house and ask to see a phenomenon, like going into a shop

introduced the element of time and date by repeating the record that the Polish investigators “spent the nights of 28-9 June and 28-9 July at the rectory,” one is naturally prompted to compare the times spent in observation by these respective groups at about these dates, or “during a prolonged period”--whatever the authors may mean by that.

From the connection of dates (“28-9 June and 28-9 July”), even without confirmation by the original printed report, one might logically (and, of course, correctly) deduce that Lt. Nawrocki and his companions were at the rectory all night (when conditions are presumably most favorable for “ghostly” manifestations)<sup>2</sup> and thus, understandably, might have obtained results where the other investigators failed.

A reference to a summary of the Cambridge Commission reports (EBR, p. 163) sheds no light on the question of hours spent at the rectory on the occasions the authors have chosen for purpose of comparison. There is no reason to suppose our critics were particularly pleased with this suggested disparity in their contrasted examples; indeed, one would suppose that their wish would have been to have been able to prove that the English investigators spent as much watchful time at the rectory, during these negative visits, as did the Poles during their two positive all-night vigils. It is not surprising then to see that (consciously or otherwise) the authors have done the best they could to allay this time problem. In contrast with the “visit” of “22 June,” and comparing favorably with the “nights” of 28-9 June and 28-9 July, HBR assures us Cambridge investigators were present 16-17 July 1943.

But lest one be led “astray” by this “suggestion,” and believe that the English

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for a pound of tea. One has to wait for it...” MHH, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. S.H. Glanville’s “analysis of the phenomena that occurred at Borley during a period of less than twelve months during Mr Foyster’s occupancy of the Rectory [showed that] Of the forty-five major manifestations... 80 percent occurred during the hours of darkness...” MHH, p. 189. “An analysis of the total incidents of a paranormal character, covering many years, shows that 80 percent occurred during the hours of, darkness or dusk...” S.H. Glanville, FATE, October, 1951, p. 107.

investigators were, during these dates, on watch during at least one all-night period, perusal of the page from which the authors first got these dates (and which they cite as authority) will provide no evidence that the Cambridge Commission representatives were present anywhere at Borley throughout the night of “16-17 July 1943.” However, it does prove that the authors of HBR have mutilated the record and combined the dates of two visits into one!<sup>3</sup>

Another difference of potential importance, neither acknowledged nor considered in HBR, is the fact that on both of Lt. Nawrocki’s reported visits four observers were present, while the contrasting negative investigations were undertaken on two of the occasions by two, and on one only by three, inquirers. Here---for all we know---may be a factor contributing to the positive results of the former visits. In a word, it may be that, in such business, “two heads are better than one,” etc... though perhaps the three authors of HBR may now even dissent to that.<sup>4</sup>

But one observes with curiosity that, in endeavoring to prove that the Polish party allegedly obtained a surfeit of phenomena “during a prolonged period when merely faint and occasional ‘manifestations,’ if any, were being reported,” the authors exercised some occult ingenuity in selecting for comparable examples these three special dates marking Cambridge Commission visits. They were, it seems, careful to omit the dates of June 8, June 9, and June 19 of the same year, the only other dates (with one exception---a negative one) of visits by representatives of the Cambridge Commission between April and September, 1943. During these visits, many strange phenomena were remarked, among them being: unusual temperature readings; sounds resembling scratching, footsteps, squeaks, “knee-cracking,” “someone traveling round the room flicking the walls with a duster” (See p. ), “a tin being kicked,” “small stones

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<sup>3</sup> “Visit 16.---A visit by J.H. Angel, I.W. Broomhead, and I.S. Longmuir on the night of July 16, 1943, was also without interest.

“Visit 17.---A visit by R.A. Brown and J.E. Lankester on the night of July 17,1943, again failed to yield any results of interest.” (EBR, p. 163.)

being thrown against the wall,” “door banging;” there was a detection of a “subclinically fruity smell;” sightings were made of a “whitish object” seen to “cross the lawn and disappear into the trees,” and of a “white shape at the base of a tree,”---all and more (whether normal or paranormal) remaining mysterious (EBR, pp. 159-63.) In fact, during just this interval occurred some of the best phenomena recorded over a period of years by the Cambridge Commission. One could cite, for example, the temperature variations between two apparently normal thermometers, read after midnight, June 19; and, the visual appearance seen at 1:17 a.m., during the same visit (Ibid., pp. 162-3.)<sup>5</sup>

As for the allegedly barren “prolonged period,” the authors fail to mention that from October 1941 to July 1944, during which all but one of the Cambridge Commission’s twenty-five exploratory visits were made (one other, the negative first, having occurred more than two years previously, in 1939), fifteen of these vigils were positive, resulting in “events of possible paranormal significance,” according to the chief investigator’s introduction (EBR, p. 148) and the writer’s calculation.

As for the curious fact that an abundance of phenomena was reported at some times and “merely faint and occasional ‘manifestations,’ if any” were witnessed at other times, one would be proceeding on dangerous grounds of dogma to assume that there might not be a rational explanation in terms of natural law to explain the fact, even supposing the phenomena were paranormal. The “fatigue curve” in Parapsychology’s ESP experiments is too well-known to necessitate explanation, except to say that it is brought to mind by Harry Price’s assertion he found the Borley Rectory phenomena were “cyclic and recurrent... gradually weaker at each

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<sup>4</sup> “I think that phenomena are more varied and more violent when many people are present,” wrote Harry Price Poltergeist Over England, p. 26).

<sup>5</sup> It is, perhaps, noteworthy that of the “Commission” visits found among these dates, this occasion is the only one within seventeen or eighteen days of either 28-9 June or 28-9 July and that is thus recorded as extending in

recurrence...” MHH, p.185. It is not too difficult to imagine that the four outstanding visits of this period, two by the English group (June 9-10 and June 19-20), and two by the Polish group (June 28-9 and July 28-9) happened to coincide with peak periods of some occult cycle; and this is the more arresting as a possibility when one considers that the authors cite no negative reports of visits within sixty or so hours of these prolific vigils.

## II.

As for the attempt to gild Lt. Nawrocki’s report in garish tones---to so color it that it might fit their need for laughing-stock--by alleging it represents “a cross-section of virtually the whole of the more sensational traditional phenomena,” (one of their more pretentious charges the authors do not undertake to prove), several things need be said. To begin, one wonders whether the critics have forgotten the “headless man,” the horse-drawn “coach,” the mysterious fires, the wall-writings, the “apports,” the displacement of ringed objects, the “touches,” the “ghost” lights, the “intelligent” knockings---all of which do not exhaust the list of “the more sensational traditional phenomena” Lt. Nawrocki did not report! The types of phenomena he did report, as cited in HBR, include no more than (a) throwing (stones); (b) noises of: door-shutting, scratching, whispering, thumps; (c) sightings of black shadows.<sup>6</sup> While contrasting these

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observation time beyond the midnight hour.

<sup>6</sup> One is surprised, on examining the authors’ summary of the Polish report, to find that these incidents, “a cross-section of virtually the whole...” , have been appreciably downgraded, along with the chief reporter, Lt. Nawrocki (Dr G.B. Nawrocki, EBR, p. 70), who, like the leader of the contemporary Cambridge Commission (or “Cambridge Commission” as the authors prefer to put it), lost his credentials too in HBR (See p. ).

For example, a report that a door on the first level, “which was shut” when last seen, “opens and then shuts again with a great noise”---when “nobody was on the ground floor”---is diminished to “A noise of door-shutting.” (EBR, p. 69. Cf. p. 148, HBR.)

At least five examples of stone-throwing and one instance of brick-throwing are, in HBR, diminished to “Four examples of stone throwing. “ (HBR, p. 148.) These events occurred during the party’s first visit, according to the report. It is true the authors, in this instance, have prefaced their summary with the qualifying “inter alia” (“among other things”), a device appearing in HBR on more than one occasion, apparently a warning to the reader he is not getting all of the facts. But even so, from the authors I presentation, one might readily assume that, after all, there were really only “four” examples of stone-throwing on the record here for 28-9 June.

But, if the use of this device in introduction to their summary of the first night’s record puts the reader on guard that evidence is omitted, its absence from HBR’s introduction to experiences of the second night (and simple

marvelous phenomena with “faint” manifestations, “if any,” the authors of HBR fail to tell their reader that, as shown above, the Cambridge Commission investigators, in the month as the first reported Polish visit, not only witnessed incidents resembling all of the phenomena (with but one exception) reported by Lt. Nawrocki but recorded experiences of still more types, these latter including the sound of footsteps, temperature variations, and an inexplicable odour.

It is true that in addition to hearing no “whisperings,” the Cambridge observers, so far as the summary of their reports for this interval goes, also distinguished no “black shapes.” On the other hand, what they did report (viz., a “whitish object” and a “white shape,” observed respectively by one and by two witnesses) is, in my opinion, comparable with what Lt. Nawrocki reported as regards general type, sensationalism, and traditions of Borley Rectory. In fact, to see white shapes instead of black in the dark is undoubtedly more sensational, i.e., natural shadows are never white.

So much for the authors’ arbitrarily exaggerated description of the “sensational” Polish report! While attempting to secure a round of laughs at Lt. Nawrocki’s expense, the authors of HBR appear to have judiciously avoided those points of evidence which disprove their important but false contention that the reported experiences of the Polish investigators (and their two English companions, who remain unnamed, much to the critics’ perplexity) were out of order, both in time and in type, as compared with Cambridge Commission observations of the same period. This is the more noteworthy because, as will shortly be seen, ( ), the real nature of the Cambridge Commission reports (both as to quality and quantity of phenomena recorded) appears

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statement “the manifestations included: “---rather than “included among other things”) would hardly lead the reader to assume that there were not just “Two examples of throwing” (as the authors calculate, HBR, p. 148) during this second visit, but at least three (EBR, p. 70.) And, as will be seen in discussion of the matter of a “shadow of a man” reported: seen this night, HBR is guilty of more serious omission.

This kind of errant reporting is a good example of the abasing effect of unconscious prejudice, especially as it is plain to see a conscious effort was made to present the reported phenomena of these two visits as being “sensational” and thus the better to be welcomed as a “hoax.”

no where in HBR.

### III.

It is not strictly true to assert, as the authors have done with the aid of an incredulous exclamation point, that Lt. Nawrocki was “apparently suggesting” that he “saw the nun” on 28-9 June and 28-9 July. Exactly---and it pays, in the long run, for even psychical researchers “of standing” to be exact, as much on their second try as on their first Lt. Nawrocki did not suggest but, as the authors themselves just previously show, directly asked Harry Price “whether these apparitions were the phantasms of the Nun and the Rev. Harry Bull respectively,” HBR, p. 148. The authors give a reference for this, their assertion that he “asked Price;” but, significantly, none for their objection he was “apparently suggesting.”

Mr. Harry Price wrote: “In his covering letter (dated August 8, 1943, Lieutenant Nawrocki says: ‘I am quite sure that I twice saw the shadow on the Nun’s Walk, and once a shadow of a man in Room No. 3.’ He asked...” EBR, p. 71.

Precisely, what the reporter saw, by his own confession, was “a black shadow moving slowly between the trees on the Nun’s walk. The shadow vanished between the second and third tree near the wall”; and again, “a shadow moving between the second and third tree and vanishes after five to ten seconds”; and, still later, “a black shape or shadow of a man...” EBR, pp. 69-70. These remarks, of themselves, suggest no more than the “‘round dark object’ which might, she said, have been ‘a short, stooping figure,’” reported by Mrs Lloyd Williams to have been seen moving amid the trees along the Nun’s Walk, in February, 1938 (See ); or, the “dark figure” seen by Mr. V.C. Wall, accompanied by Harry Price, as it “moved along the path” (the Nun’s Walk) in June, 1929; or, the “dark outline” reported by the leader of the Cambridge Commission, to have been seen in November 1941, as, preceded by footsteps, it moved amid the moonlight

and shadows of the rectory stairs (See ).

That the authors “can only imagine” Lt. Nawrocki’s account “to have been based on an elaborate hoax of some sort,” and that they propose to stand aghast at the alleged incongruity of these his claims, suggests either that, at this point in discussion, they have by reason of some “psychological mechanism” forgotten these comparable testimonies in the case, or that they hope their readers have.

#### IV.

In the eager effort to isolate Lt. Nawrocki’s claims, the authors have asserted as fact that the apparition of the ‘nun’ had been claimed to have been seen otherwise by only two witnesses (only upon two occasions) since the Bull incumbencies. Not only has this allegation been proven a falsehood (See last page), not only have we seen that these two experiences are grossly distorted in HBR, but, as shown above, the contemporary Cambridge Commission reported, by record the authors suppressed, similar or comparable apparitions or phenomena. These lapses of recollection (assuming any one of the three authors ever read the whole of Harry Price’s two Barley Rectory books---a question upon which the reader remains unenlightened) tempt one to assume that the “psychological mechanism of forgetting unwelcome facts,” which, the authors “stress”, is “applicable to many,” is even applicable to “Psychical Researchers of standing,” providing they are sufficiently imbued with desire to expose a “hoax”!

#### V.

Apparently on the authority of Mr. Trevor H. Hall, HBR exhibits another effort to brand the Nawrocki report as incongruous. Against the record that Lt. Nawrocki (as the authors put it) “heard whisperings,” they set the allegation that Mr. S.H. Glanville stated “that no voices were heard during the official observer period...”

Whatever the origin of such a categorical statement---and, for several rather obvious reasons, among them being the lack of proper published documentation, the writer declines to admit the burden is upon the late Mr. Glanville---, the statement is neither true nor altogether relevant. Moreover, the “official observer period”, about which Mr Glanville intimately knew so much, ended more than five years before the first reported Polish visit. Even supposing “no voices were heard at all” then, such a fact would militate against “whisperings” during 1943 no more than against “whisperings” (heard by the Rev. G. Eric Smith) in 1929, except in the view of someone who dogmatically assumes psychic phenomena must conform to their own imagined, expected pattern.

But the fact is that the Nawrocki report makes no mention of “voices”; and the reported “whisperings,” one need hardly point out, does not in any sense necessarily imply voices. Nevertheless, the statement attributed to Mr. Glanville is strictly false, for the authors themselves recite (HBR, p. 134-5) that on 18 December 1937, “one of the official observers, Mr. J. Burden of Christ Church, Oxford... again heard ‘talking and footsteps’ which he thought ‘must come’ from the Arbons’ cottage although they could not be seen.” By which it would have to be admitted that “during the official observer period” at least one voice was heard on more than one occasion, or that voice were heard, the origin of the “talking”---whether normal or paranormal---remaining unknown. And it would be trite to insist that Psychological Researchers, whether of “standing” or otherwise, are not properly interested in what witnesses think “must” be so; but, in why and on what evidence opinions are so offered. (A discussion of Mr Burden’s account, and of various errors made by the authors of HBR in reference to it, appears .)

Another instance of hearing what seemed to be human oral sounds was recorded by the Cambridge Commission during the year of the Polish officers’ visits. Four witnesses at the

Rectory heard “three whistles at intervals of five to ten seconds... like the noise human beings make when trying to attract somebody’s attention. Each whistle was a little more insistent than the one before. At the end of the third whistle we opened the door leading out to the courtyard and asked the pair on the plank if they had whistled. On receiving the answer ‘No’ we shut the door, switched off our torches, and waited in silence. For the fourth time we heard the whistle, but it took about four minutes before we had mustered sufficient courage to open the other door and investigate the two rooms opposite the scullery and the back staircase. We found nothing. It (EBR, p.165).

Of this, the authors of HBR observe, “...traditional courtyard and cottage phenomena were experienced, including... whistling which appeared to come from ‘the direction of the neighbouring cottage’...” (HBR, p. 153). Aside from the curious attempt to include this seemingly solitary instance of “whistling” among the “traditional” phenomena, it is obvious the critics would like to have it believed that the sounds did in fact originate with an inhabitant of the cottage. The original report recognized such an origin as a legitimate hypothesis, though no attempt is made to show the cottage was occupied at all on this date. But, to picture this supposition as a probability, HBR misrepresents the record. As published, no unqualified assertion was made by any one of the four witnesses present that the noises described as “whistlings” or as intermittent “whistles,” and set down in HBR as “whistling” (in this instance, an errant and important difference), “appeared to come from the direction of the cottage.”

Of the two witnesses in the scullery, and so presumably best situated to evaluate the sounds, one “thought the whistles originated from the back staircase just outside the scullery door” (that is to say, opposite to and against the direction of the cottage, as the two observers, “eating sandwiche” in the room, must themselves have been between the cottage and this door;

see Fig. I ). Only one of the four, the other witness in the scullery, is reported to have “thought they came from further back in the direction of the neighbouring cottage...” (that is to say, apparently, not just outside the door, but further back in the Rectory, further back in that direction,) EBR, p. 165. It is noteworthy, in this respect, to read that they both looked for the source of the sounds in this direction; and not, outside, in the direction of the cottage itself. Moreover, since the authors choose to sponsor the idea (or, as Major the Hon. Henry Douglas Home might put it, the proven fact) that the rectory courtyard acted as an amplifier and transmitter for sounds originating at the cottage, it is odd, to say the least, that neither of these witnesses to mysterious “whistles” detected any sign (or reported any evidence to show) the sounds appeared to come from the courtyard or from the other door (see Fig. I) which opened into the courtyard. Neither (likewise) does it appear that the sounds gave any evidence of penetrating by way of the window over the “sink” (see Fig. I), the one aperture into the room closest to, and directly accessible to sound waves approaching from the cottage. These evidences are important facts, facts either unknown to the authors of HBR or otherwise prudently omitted. In all, their summary of this incident of “whistles,” like most everything else in HBR, graphically illustrates how, with judicious care and prejudice, testimony can be carefully chosen, extracted, and profitably manipulated (consciously or otherwise.)

## VI.

Having seen the manner by which the authors attempted to render less believable Lt. Nawrocki’s testimony to a “shadow” moving between the trees along the Nun’s Walk, one discovers how, by similar exaggeration and omission, a try is made to magnify the incredibility of (as HBR puts it) “what he imagined might be the ghost of Harry Bull...”<sup>7</sup> This, HBR

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<sup>7</sup> As previously, with respect to the ‘nun,’ he did no more than “ask” Harry Price, doubtless as an authority on the history of the case, whether the “shadow” seen was the “phantasm” of “the Rev. Harry Bull.” EBR, p. 71.

pronounces positively, was “previously seen by nobody but Mrs Foyster...”

Besides being apparently false otherwise, this assertion by the authors of the HBR gives the reader a rare insight into the real value (or lack of it) the authors themselves put upon the testimony of their own best witness, Mrs. Smith, for it was Mrs. Smith who declared with emphasis:

“Mr. Price told my husband he (Mr. Price) saw the last rector, Mr. Bull, standing behind him in a dressing gown, which he described. Somebody who had known Mr. Bull said he had had a dressing gown like that., [In reply to KMG’s query as to whether she was sure it was Price himself who maintained he saw this spirit form, Mrs. Smith replied, ‘I am quite, quite certain it was Mr. Price himself who saw this phantom behind my husband at that moment and that he was not describing someone else’s vision.}]” HBR, p. 46.

(One wonders why Mrs. Smith was so “quite, quite certain” anyone---the suspected Mr. Price least of all!---“saw this phantom...” One cannot help speculating on the question of how far Mrs. Smith is “open to the possibility of spirit communication and/or expression”; and, whether the authors have really told all she may profess to know about “spirits” “influencing” the “sub-conscious mind”!)

Whatever construction one may here put upon Mrs. Smith’s ghost story, it must not be forgotten that this tale was told eight or nine years after Mrs. Smith declared she had read Price’s MHH, in which the author, I annotating the Rev. Foyster’s Summary (op. cit., pp. 75, 77), relates a much similar incident involving Mrs Foyster’s vision of “Harry Bull” and identification by means of the dressing gown.

Otherwise, the allegation that “the ghost of Harry Bull” was “previously seen by nobody but Mrs. Foyster” is much to be doubted. For example, in his Summary (MHH, p. 79), the Rev.

Foyster recorded under date of March 24, 1931: "... 'Harry Bull' seen again by Marianne at night about this time; and, probably, by cottage tenant through stair window." The tenant was, evidently, the Mr. D'Arles who for a time lived in the cottage (HBR, p. 75), and who, the authors tell us, also allegedly saw "a [psychic] monstrosity in the corridor." (Ibid., p. 122.)

Again, the "dressing gown" brings to question the identity of the apparition in "the shape of a human being in long robes" described by Mr. G.P.J. L'Estrange as seen during his visit to the rectory, in company with the Marks Tey spiritualist group, in January, 1932. As he and his friends were sitting in his bedroom "Some time after midnight the air seemed to get much colder within a few minutes, and I could see something luminous on the other side of the bed. As I watched it the patch of luminosity got larger and denser, until it roughly resembled the shape of a human being in long robes..." (EBR, p. 61-2.) Apparently this same apparition is that described in the report of the group: "About 3 a.m. a black shadow appeared to develop against the wall..." (EBR, p. 63.) One naturally suspects that this figure in "long robes" was "the ghost of Harry Bull"---whatever that may have been---in dressing-gown, which was seen by Marianne Foyster "during a visit of a party of spiritualists in January 1932," according to the Rev. Foyster's account in Fifteen Months, mentioned in HBR, p. 89.

Whatever one may think of all these statements by avowed "psychists", there are other testimonies which (so far as they go) might well answer to an apparition of 'Harry Bull.' The report of Lt. Nawrocki is itself grossly distorted by the authors of HBR. There the experience is summarized as: "Lt. Nawrocki saw a black shape or shadow of a man silhouetted on the wall of the chapel which stood there for ten or twenty seconds and then vanished very slowly." (HBR, p. 148.) The original published account reads: "00.30 a.m. A great thump is heard on the first floor (location unknown.) English party [the "two English boys"] come up to investigate the matter. The boys remain five or six minutes in Room No.5 and then go through Room No.3, where they

see a shadow of a man which vanished very quickly. Hearing their exclamations of astonishment, Lieut. Nawrocki follows them, and, passing the passage leading from Room No.5. to Room No. 3, suddenly sees a black shape or a shadow of a man silhouetted on the wall of the chapel. The shadow stands there without moving for ten to twenty seconds, and then vanishes very slowly.” EBR, p . 70.

If black shadows of this sort are about---whatever their provenance---it is obvious the fact will be more readily believed if they are reported seen by several persons, instead of just one. Especially is this so when examining “apparitions” which may so easily be simply the result of individual auto-suggestion. As experts on personal dissuasion, the authors of HBR would properly know the reaction to be expected as a result of their complete omission of the fact that the Nawrocki account reported “a shadow of a man” was seen not only individually but also collectively.

The type of image here reported as seen by three persons is somewhat paralleled by a “visual phenomenon” recorded in the Cambridge Commission report and noticed in HBR only by the brief line: “a dark outline among the shadows” HBR, p. 151. The report of Visit 2., submitted by “A.J.B. Robertson and I.P. Williams,” refers to November 1,1941:

“We had been sitting there in complete silence for some time (ten to fifteen minutes), when at about 2.10 a.m. we heard three or four very distinct and heavy footsteps, as though a person was descending the pantry stairs. We feel no doubt about this observation. After about a minute we approached as silently as possible. One of us (A.R.) on looking at the stairs observed a distinct movement among the shadows, some dark outline moving from a position partially in the moonlight, into complete darkness, rather quickly. On illuminating the shadows with a dim red light used throughout, nothing could be seen. This shape was not seen by the other observer,

therefore we cannot definitely affirm its appearance...’

“The report also remarks that the dark outline was found by experiment not to be a shadow of either investigator...” EBR, p. 151.

Aside from the providential omission of this Cambridge Commission account, the authors of HBR have subjected the witness’s testimony to various forms of degrading manipulation, by reference, as will shortly be seen ( .)

## VII.

As regards the bald declaration that “stone-throwing” “never previously occurred except on those occasions when either Marianne Foyster or Harry Price was at Borley,” it too is a false statement, one more curious example of the kind of memory-lapse often suffered under the stress and stimulation of unrestrained skepticism.

To begin with, even were the allegation a fact (and just how the authors can feel so confident that they know all about stone-throwing at Borley Rectory is another of the little mysteries of the case), it would still have no determinative value. This is true simply because the presence of Marianne Foyster or Harry Price (or even Lt. G.B. Nawrocki) “at Barley” (as HBR puts it) would be of little significance unless one could say with assurance that during the stone-throwing at Barley Rectory one or the other of the suspects was not only “at Barley” but at Borley Rectory; and, not only at this Rectory, but present at the immediate scene of the manifestation and so situated as to be able to initiate the action by normal means and without detection. Without such information of circumstances, we would be allowed to assume that the suspects not only did not, but could not have performed the reported feats by normal means; and might, for all we know, have themselves been, in these instances, unconscious mediums. These are some of the difficulties of supposition, in the absence of proofs, about which the authors of

HBR appear to know nothing. To appease their spirit of scientific curiosity, no more is evidently needed than that conviction be assured (by whatever means) that, as in this instance, an insinuating allegation is true.

But here, it is not, at least so far as the record itself goes. On their own showing (HBR, p. 23), Mr. Shaw Jeffrey recalled that so far back as 1885 there was “physical ‘phenomena’” of “‘Stones falling about...’” at Borley Rectory.

Moreover, what precisely do the authors mean by “examples of stone-throwing” and “stone-throwing was experienced”? Are they using the reference in the same sense reporter Nawrocki used it? And what did he mean? He refers to the “throwing” of twenty or thirty and more stones; but by what means were these phenomena “experienced”? By sight?---but it was night, the rectory was unlighted, and no mention is made that any of the observers ever saw a moving stone. By touch?---on only one reported occasion was any one of the group touched; and then only by the stone “hitting him on the shoulder” (a statement which, like the only other presumably tactile sensation of “throwing”<sup>8</sup>; is amenable to the theory some part of the wreckage fell from overhead, dislodged by a passing breeze or transient vibration.) What, then, do these “experiences” of the Nawrocki party amount to, in the record? For a certainty, they constitute sounds of stone-throwing. (Indeed, far from seeking to inflate the evidence for Poltergeist activity at Borley Rectory, Harry Price, the skeptic, even went so far as to suggest these kinds of sounds were, perhaps, no more than “an echo of the many stones that were actually thrown during the palmy days of the haunting”---a suggestion quite out of style with the “Harry Price” painted by HBR, and, consequently, not to be found in that book. See EBR, pp. 177-8.) And, it is significant that, just nineteen days before the first visit of the Polish investigators, the Cambridge

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<sup>8</sup> “2.40 a.m. Second Lieut. Ligaszewski makes some remark to Lieut. Kujawa, who asks him to be quiet ‘because a brick could easily be thrown from the ceiling upon our heads.’ He has hardly finished speaking, when half a brick is

observers who visited the rectory on the night of June 9-10 reported they heard “the sound of small stones being thrown against the wall...” (EBR, p. 161.) And, three Cambridge reporters had, earlier in April of the same year, recalled hearing, in response to a “request” made during “a definite lull in the wind,” “a sound as of a brick being dropped from a height into the courtyard just outside the kitchen passage” Ibid, p. 159.

But of even greater significance, I venture to say, is the fact that not only have the authors of mill been unable to remember these “unwelcome facts,” in their attack upon the relative reliability of Lt. Nawrocki’s report, but later, in their accounting of what comprised the unexplained phenomena reported as noteworthy by the Cambridge Commission observers, they suppress all mention of responsive brick-dropping or the sound of stone-throwin!

Beyond this, however, had no “stone-throwing” ever been experienced at Borley Rectory before 28-9 June 1943, it would be of less significance than the fact that three days after the Poles left the site, on August 1, 1943, a party visited the rectory and a Miss Mary George, “a Press Officer of the Dominions Office” was “struck by a pebble,” EBR, p. 77. One wonders whether, in their conversation of 14 January 1953 with Mr. R.F. Aickman, who accompanied Miss George and who headed the party, Dr. Dingwall and Mrs. Goldney recalled this incident while discussing with him his assertion he had, during one of his visits at that time, been told a group of Polish officers had paid 5 Pounds for the privilege of encamping there, HBR, p. 150. Whether or not this incident had been forgotten---and I am rather disinclined to assume so, in view of the fact objection is made only that “stone-throwing” had never “previously occurred” etc.-it is certain the authors did not recall it for the enlightenment of the readers of HBR!

### VIII.

Here is one of those rare instances when an assertion by Harry Price is truly treasured in HBR--

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thrown from the ceiling and falls directly in the centre of the ‘table,’ making a great noise.” EBR, p. 69.

-but only, it seems, because it can be presumably used to prove “the impossibility of a human being reaching the Blue Room window.” The critics set this out in unmistakable terms, seeing that Lt. Nawrocki reported that, on his second night’s vigil, he was at the window of Room No.5, while a companion was at the window of the Blue Room (HBR, p. 150.)

But what the authors overlook, amidst much else, is the obvious qualification Price put upon his statement, viz., “No human being could have climbed up to that window under the existing conditions...” Do the critics seriously believe that military officers, specially trained in the rigours and skills of surmounting just such physical obstacles as were presented by the rectory ruins, and having a day previously reconnoitered the ruins, could not have (with or without the aid of rope) easily mounted up to the first floor level and to the Blue Room and its window? Are the authors honestly suggesting that, even though the verandah had collapsed, gables had fallen, and “tower” vanished, and, as Price puts it, “some of the half-burnt rafters supporting the first floor” had crashed into the cellars, etc., by August 1943, the necessary choice is between “an elaborate hoax of some sort” or assumption that the soldiers did in fact climb up to the remaining rafters and the still standing windows?

One wonders how long such an “impossibility” would endure under the hammer blows of skepticism, if it were a necessary choice between a “ghost” and an “impossibility”!

But, as to be expected, there are determinative facts which fails to show, facts which, when shown, shatter its thesis. Number one is that the readers are never allowed an opportunity for a realistic view of the Rectory ruins. Mr. Price published several such photographs; the authors provide none. The photographs show the scene on dates from March 28,1939 (Plate VII, EBR.) to April 5,1944 (Plate XXII, EBR). Plate X shows timbers laid out on which to cross open spaces where original flooring and rafters had burned away “By the Burnt-out ‘Blue Room;’”;

Plate XV shows that as late as January 5, 1944, from a view within the courtyard, there was little or no sign of damage to a large section of the walls, and window-glass is shown still intact (testifying, incidentally, to the good conduct or scarcity of “small boys” at Borley!); Plate XXII, taken after actual demolition work had progressed for some time, shows walls, rooms, roofing, chimneys, and flooring (on ,the upper level) intact.

Nor is this the only evidence the authors might have provided had they chose to help their reader to a correct conclusion. The leader of the Cambridge Commission recalls (EBR, p. 149) that “during the Easter vacation of 1939,” on the occasion of “The first visit to the Rectory in the present series,” it was found “possible to get into all the rooms on both floors and into the cellars.”

Elsewhere, in fact, one learns that only four days before the last of the (2) Polish visits reported, Mr. R.F. Aickman, accompanied by his wife and the aforementioned Miss. George, “were standing on the first floor looking down the well of the main staircase”! (EBR, p. 76).

Besides these evidences, there is the report of Mr. Aickman himself that numerous signs of military occupation and activity were then discernable at the site; and there appears evidence that the building itself may have been put to some related use, (EBR, p. 79). It remains evident that during the four years between the fire and the arrival of Lt. Nawrocki and his party, a number of groups, from the military to the Cambridge Commission, had invaded the grounds with an intention of exploring or utilizing the building and rooms, or the site. The Blue Room itself was a particular rendezvous for visitors, among whom were the six Cambridge Commission investigators who, on the night of June 8, 1943, took thermometer readings “at the ‘cold spot’” (EBR, p. 160), which is illustrated in Plate X (EBR) as being “in the centre of the plank bridge” by the Blue Room; as well as the two Commission observers who, on June

10,1943, at “12.7 a.m”, spent a period “in Blue Room” itself (EBR, p. 160).

Not only are these valuable clues kept back from the readers of HBR, in order to prolong and preserve an “impossibility,” but when meeting up with the report that “three observers” of the Cambridge Commission were “sleeping in Bedroom 2” (See First Floor, Fig. II ) on “the night of April 30, 1944,” when already “the ruin was being demolished and removed,” the authors, for reasons best known to themselves (but which may not be difficult to rightly guess), omit the facts and, hardly more than a page past their concluding expression of incredibility at the claim a Pole sat in the Blue Room window, substitute their own rendering of the Cambridge account: “...three investigators supposedly asleep inside the rectory...”---! (HBR, p. 152.)

Lastly, as regards that other “impossibility,” viz., the rebuilding of the Blue Room floor “in the space of an hour,” the reader may see by consulting the tenth line of the “Second Night” report (EBR, p. 70) : “Lieut. Kujawa and Lieut. Nawrocki ‘rebuild’ the floor of the Blue Room, and bring in some straw.”<sup>9</sup> And, far from being “mildly unhappy about this,” Harry Price, no less than his biographer,<sup>10</sup> no less than any competent reader, readily discerned the wit and did not fail to preserve it for posterity. (In fact, one suspects that the author who hoped the readers of his EBR would derive “half the pleasure out of reading this evidence” he did “out of collecting it,”<sup>11</sup> may still be chuckling over this remark by Lt. Nawrocki, perhaps now more than ever--a possibility upon which the informative Mrs. Smith may yet be able to enlighten Dr. Dingwall and his eminent colleagues.)

Strangely enough, the only proposal to consider whether or not “the floor of the Blue

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<sup>9</sup> This skill at “building” was anticipated the previous night when, the report reads” “...the party... build ‘seats,’ using bricks found in the garden. The half-burnt drawer from the pantry is used as a table.” EBR, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> BGH, p. 264.

<sup>11</sup> EBR, p. 337.

Room was rebuilt in the space of an hour” was made by the authors of HBR, who tell us we are now in “a sort of Borley ‘silly season’” of extravagant legend. But even they could not have managed this singular feat, except by reason of the fact they (by design or by malobservation) omitted the quotation marks of Lt. Nawrocki and, for once allowing the comedy in the case to escape them, built a strange monument to themselves in the space of a page.