

OCCULT FRAUDS  
AND  
THE SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

A  
Dissection of  
The Technique of "Exposing" As Seen  
In The Charges Against

Harry Price  
(The Case of Borley Rectory)

and

Dr. GUSTAVE GELEY  
(The Case of "Eva C.")

by

WALTER A. CARRITHERS JR.

Member, The Society for Psychical Research

Member, The American Society for Psychical Research

Member, The Fortean Society

## HARRY PRICE---Guilty or Innocent?

We live in a flippant age. Never before in history have so many so effortlessly, so carelessly, sought truth. Millions, with the turn of a page, dispell their doubts and fancy themselves well-informed. There is every reason to suppose that The Haunting Of Borely Rectory, by Eric J. Dingwall, Kathleen M. Goldney, and Trevor H. Hall, “Published under the auspices of the Society of [sic] Psychical Research,”<sup>1</sup> will satisfy thousands. But can it really, as predicted, “lay for all time the ghosts of Borley Rectory”---?<sup>2</sup>

What is of greater importance, has this report of “S.P.R. enquiry” really, as predicted, already laid the ghost of Harry Price? Mrs. W.H. Salter, one of parapsychology’s leading critics and historians, one-time Research Officer for over 30 years Editor, later Vice-President, and presently a Member of the Council, S.P.R., in a review for the American Society for Psychical Research, has put it bluntly, “For many years Price was widely (though not universally) accepted as a leading authority on psychical research, but where does he stand now? ... Of the part he played in building up an imposing façade of falsehood, by gross inaccuracy and exaggeration, on the one hand, and suppression of what he himself apparently believed to be the truth, on the other, there can be no question. “That accusation has been proved to the hilt and Price’s reputation is thereby destroyed.”<sup>3</sup>

But what is of supreme importance, what is of critical and fundamental concern to parapsychologists and students of psychic phenomena, is the design by Dr Dingwell, Mrs. Goldney, and Mr. Hall to claim for themselves and their work the status of counsel to present-

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., London, 16s. (Also published as Vol. 51, Part 186, Proceedings, The Society for Psychical Research.

<sup>2</sup> Time, February 13, 1956, p. 24.

day psychological research. “Were this report merely another attempt to expose a badly conducted and fraudulent case, we should not have attempted it. It is, however much more than that, for here we have tried to show how this kind of evidence is to be appraised, how important is it to understand the psychology of testimony, and how fatally easy it is to be led astray in this field, when those who should exhibit the most absolute integrity in their work are themselves in the plot to deceive their followers and the public who believe in their good faith. Finally, the report illustrates the influence of suggestion in this work, and shows how, once the mind has been affected, belief can be strengthened and simple events misinterpreted in order to fit them into the desired pattern.” (H[aunting of] B[orley] R[ectory], p. 176.)

It would not be possible within the confines of this book to comprehensively evaluate the evidence for the ‘haunting’ of Borley Rectory.<sup>4</sup> Nor would the writer attempt any such examination without an exhaustive cross-check of all published sources of reference and careful perusal of the vast fund of original data, relevant and yet unpublished. It is impossible to state with confidence what if any paranormal claims for the “haunting” are true. In fact, I am convinced that no one relying for information solely upon the “S.P.R. enquiry” report is qualified to express any comprehensive evaluation of the points at issue, without exception should be rigidly observed. And that is the rule that, before a final expression of belief or of determination, all evidence concerned must be fully considered. Without knowledge that this has been done, one can never be confident that some unknown, unavailable, or unpublished fact---omitted inadvertently, unknowingly, or even deliberately---could not upset “the best-laid-scheme.”

The essential justification of this rule is reflected in the assurance by the three co-authors that in their work they have “done our best to admit nothing relevant.” (HBR, Preface, p. viii.)

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<sup>3</sup> An Appraisal by Mrs. W.H. Salter of “The Haunting of Borely Rectory: A Critical Survey of the Evidence.” Pp. 66-70, The Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research, Vol. L, No. 2.

But this affirmation can offer us no comfort unless, and until, we determine for ourselves whether the authors' "best" is sufficient. We can do this in but one way, ---by judiciously dissecting the methodology of the accusers, by appraising their powers of observation, collation, and analysis, and by ascertaining whether they themselves in truth have observed proper modes of caution and so escaped being "led astray" by that fatal "influence of suggestion" about which they so rightly and righteously cautioned others.

The task is a very simple one: Harry Price is the accused; Dingwall, Goldney, and Hall, the prosecution; and we, the jury. Until we see the complete evidence, we cannot by any possible means, short of sheer faith---which has no place in psychical research---feel confident that the prosecution has presented all relevant facts or has given as much conscientious attention to the evidence for the accused as it has given to the evidence for the accusation.

The authors have had quite a bit to say respecting the opinions of the two late eminent jurists, Sir Albion Richardson, K.C., S.B.E., and Sir Ernest Jelf, Senior Master of the Supreme Court, who commented favorably on the evidence for paranormal phenomena at Borley Rectory, (HBR, pp. 8, 171.) And they have ventured to contrast the methods of determination in psychical research with the processes of Law, to the comparative depreciation of the latter. But, although they have significantly failed to mention it, they cannot legitimately disregard the cardinal consideration of all legal justice: that the accused cannot be judged without a defence; and this defence cannot be framed or circumscribed---nor the relevancy of its evidence determined---by the accusers!

In the absence of an informed defence, we can then do no more than attempt to determine whether The Haunting of Borley Rectory is inherently anything more than an argument for the prosecution.

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<sup>4</sup> Vide esp., Harry Price, The Most Haunted House in England, London, 1940; The End of Borley Rectory, 1946.

Moreover, by careful analysis of certain aspects of this book---indeed, by study of its strongest points---it will be possible to determine the reliability of the accusers' methods in general. If their presentations and evaluations are in error touching issues readily available to us, we can rightly expect that their methods are no less faulty concerning points and incidents unfamiliar to us. If we discover pieces of evidence misrepresented or missing here, which are relevant to the defence, the authors' assurance that no relevant evidence was omitted elsewhere is valueless. If that which relates to the seen is false, how much less reliable must that be which relates to the unseen, the unpublished and the unavailable.