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editorial

Dr Leo Ruickbie
Editor

I walk over the bridge pictured on the front of this issue almost every day and when, early in the morning, the ground mist rises on the other side, it obliterates the real world beyond and turns this simple wooden footbridge into something magical, like Bifröst bridging the worlds to Asgard. The dog always waits for me here, suddenly unsure whether we should cross into the unknown, but as my footfalls knock on the wood like a charm against bad luck, he bounds ahead, vanishing through the grey veil.

Sometimes, or so we are told, things also come through the veil from the other side. SPR member Lew Sutton is one of those with a tale to tell of apports, asports, disembodied voices and other strange goings on garnered during a year of running a 'home circle' to investigate Spiritualist phenomena. I greatly admire his DIY approach. Rather than waiting for the professors to get around to doing anything, he has done it for himself. It would be called 'citizen science' today, but this kind of approach was once at the heart of the SPR, since its earliest forays into haunted houses and séance rooms, conducting thought transference experiments in its offices and surveys among the general public. It is something that the SPR no longer does. Should it try and do it again?

As noted in my presentation before the Parapsychological Association in Paris in the summer of 2019, the SPR is facing growing competition: bottom-up pressure from the ghost hunters and others, who in many cases have never heard of the SPR; and top-down pressure from academia, which is increasingly doing much of what the SPR used to do. It is not just research, both groups are also organizing conferences, networking and publishing. What should the SPR do to answer the competition and retain its relevance in a changing marketplace?

Currently, the SPR has a very active programme of lectures, study days and conferences organized by some of our best people and attracting some of our best researchers. However, counting heads at such events, I can see that face-to-face contact reaches less than 10 per cent of the membership. The website and social media accounts, although important, are public and so are not exclusive benefits of membership and are not guaranteed to be read by members. Video is not the answer, either. The SPR's YouTube channel only has 276 subscribers and the video of the Society's President giving a talk at the 2018 conference only had 14 views at the time of writing. The single point of contact for *all* of the Society's members is print publishing – and print goes straight to their door. The SPR is the *Journal* and the *Paranormal Review* for most members.

Face-to-face activities produce more content than can be dealt with through current publishing, meaning that there is an opportunity there and, of course, I have an idea what to do about that. Research also means publication and a research programme would require a publishing programme to promote and sustain it. However, if the SPR cannot find a way to lead research, is it possible to at least find a way to make more out of what it currently does?

The SPR also stands on one side of a bridge into the unknown, the future. Should it walk uncertainly into the grey mist and perhaps disappear forever, or should it go boldly forward with purpose, with a strategy? It is time to start a debate. You can make your own views known by sending your comments, suggestions and letters to paranormalreview@spr.ac.uk. Ψ

