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First prepared in 2006 by the Survival Research Institute of Canada (Debra Barr and Walter Meyer zu Erpen); revised August 2013. Capitalization of any name or subject in the text below indicates that you will find an entry on that topic in the third edition of Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits* (2007).

Owen, A.R.G. (1919-2003), and Iris M. Owen (1916-2009)

A mathematician, geneticist, and university lecturer, A.R.G. Owen together with his wife Iris M. Owen made valuable contributions to the literature on POLTERGEISTS and PSYCHOKINESIS (PK), especially through their TABLE-TILTING experiments involving PHILIP the imaginary ghost.

Alan Robert George Owen was born on 4 July 1919, at Bristol, England, and Iris May Pepper was born on 4 January 1916, in Meldreth, Cambridgeshire. They were married on 9 January 1952 and had one son, Robin E. Owen, born 21 May 1955, who observed and assisted in the PHILIP experiments as recorder and photographer.

Known as George to his friends, Dr. A.R.G. Owen was educated at Cambridge University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in mathematics and physics (1940), a Master of Arts (1945), and a PhD in mathematical genetics (1948). During World War II, he was very involved in the invention of the system of radar that is still in use today; as an Experimental Officer in Radar Research and Development at the Admiralty Signals Establishment, he invented a radar aerial for the British War Office.

From 1948-52, Dr. Owen was a research fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge. For many years, he was a university lecturer in genetics (Cambridge, 1950-70) and mathematics (Fellow, Trinity College, 1962-70), but resigned those positions to emigrate to Canada in 1970. He wrote about 40 scientific papers in the fields of mathematics, statistics, genetics, and population theory that were published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, *Heredity*, *Biometrics*, *Biometrika*, *Sanhkya*, and *Nature*.

In 1969 the Owens were invited to immigrate to Canada where Dr. Owen was to direct the parapsychology research of the Toronto-based New Horizons Research Foundation, a non-profit organization incorporated "to promote research on the frontiers of science and disseminate information." They arrived in January 1970. The original agreement was that George and Iris Owen would conduct full-time research for the foundation for a period of five years. In 1975, Dr. Owen returned part-time to his academic career, teaching statistics and biostatistics at the University of Toronto (1975-84), first as a Visiting Professor in the Department of Mathematics (1975-76), then as Associate Professor in the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics (1976-84) and Full Professor in the Department of Zoology (1979-84).

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In the field of genetics, Dr. Owen was co-author with V. Arunachalam of *Polymorphisms with Linked Loci* (1971). In the field of PSYCHICAL RESEARCH, his first three books were published by Garrett Publications: *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* (1964); *Hysteria, Hypnosis and Healing* (1971) about the work of Jean-Martin Charcot; and with Victor Sims, *Science and The Spook* (1971), that documents eight case studies of HAUNTINGS. His *Psychic Mysteries of the North: Discoveries from the Maritime Provinces and Beyond* (1975) was first published in Canada under the title *Psychic Mysteries of Canada*.

In parapsychology, Dr. Owen's interests focussed primarily on telepathy and poltergeists. Dr. and Mrs. Owen were among the leading psychical researchers whom medium EILEEN J. GARRETT invited to the south of France to attend the early International Conferences organized by the PARAPSYCHOLOGY FOUNDATION.

Through discussion with Trevor Henry Hall (1910-1991) of the extent to which poltergeist phenomena were genuine, how much was faked, and the need for a thorough analysis of the subject, Dr. Owen began his study of a large number of poltergeist cases. Published as *Can We Explain the Poltergeist?* (1964), his research separated the doubtful cases from those that were well evidenced and examined the various explanatory theories that had been proposed. Based upon the case of the SAUCHIE POLTERGEIST that manifested around the eleven-year old Scottish schoolgirl Virginia Campbell in 1960-61, he concluded that "the objective reality of some poltergeist phenomena" had been established "beyond all reasonable doubt." The other major poltergeist outbreak investigated by Dr. Owen centred around the eleven-year old Cambridgeshire schoolboy Matthew Manning; that case began in 1966 and continued on and off for several years. After Manning had learned to control manifestation of the psychic force, he visited the Owens in Ontario in 1974. Further experiments into his psychic abilities were conducted, with interesting results.

Between 1972 and 1978, many scholarly articles reporting on investigations made by Dr. and Mrs. Owen and their associates in the New Horizons Foundation were published in the nine issues of *New Horizons: Journal of the New Horizons Research Foundation*, which also incorporated the *Transactions of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research*. George Owen was the Foundation's Vice-President and the editor of its journal. Iris Owen was Secretary-Treasurer of the Toronto Society for Psychical Research (TSPR), with ALLEN SPRAGGETT as President.

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Over a period of 25 years, the Owens authored a large number of articles in the field of psychical research. In addition, between 1984 and 1993, George Owen was the author of a series of privately-circulated New Horizons Papers about anomalous phenomena. Some 40 papers in that little-known monograph series are deposited at the Toronto Public Library's Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation and Fantasy.

The Owens' main interest in parapsychology was physical phenomena. Through their personal investigation of spontaneous phenomena in poltergeist outbreaks and their attempts to replicate Spiritualist table-tilting phenomena in the Philip SITTER GROUP, they became convinced of the reality of some physical psychic phenomena, including PK.

As leader of the Philip group, Iris Owen, with the late Sue Sparrow, wrote *Conjuring Up Philip: An Adventure in Psychokinesis* (1976) about the table-tilting experiments conducted under the auspices of the TSPR, in an attempt to replicate the studies of British investigators that suggested that group PK was possible. The Philip group chose to create a thought form with human characteristics that could communicate with them through the table; the resulting messages remained true to the invented character.

About 1977, Dr. and Mrs. Owen met Margaret Hamilton Bach, daughter of Winnipeg medical doctor THOMAS GLENDENNING HAMILTON. They came to believe, based upon Dr. Hamilton's photographs, that the non-contact, full table levitations that Dr. Hamilton had repeatedly observed with the medium Mrs. Poole were in all likelihood genuine examples of telekinesis, or PK as it has since become known.

Based upon their many years of study in the field, the Owens were not convinced that Spiritualistic phenomena necessarily prove SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH. As members of the United Church of Canada, they had faith in an AFTERLIFE and did not feel a need to prove it; however, nor did they want to disprove it or disturb the beliefs of Spiritualists. When interviewed by the Survival Research Institute of Canada in October 2006, Iris Owen indicated that she had never been convinced of any survival evidence, because there was always some other explanation possible.

Though psychic phenomena, such as table-tilting, produced by a group can be quite strong, Mrs. Owen cautioned that one must not underestimate the possible effect of a collective group mind. The Owens were convinced that the Philip phenomena resulted from the combined psychokinetic force of the sitter group. The information that Philip was able to communicate through table-rapping did not go beyond what the members of the group wanted his story to be; Philip did

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not have any knowledge that the group individually or as a whole did not possess.

Though the majority of the research undertaken by the Owens in Toronto was published in *New Horizons*, Iris Owen's one regret was that their research involving psychic photography with Detroit psychologist Tracy Wolfson was not reported. Mrs. Wolfson had the remarkable ability to capture on film an image that other observers present could not see in the space that was photographed. These experiments were repeatedly conducted under good conditions of control that involved new cameras and film. Mrs. Owen was convinced that Tracy Wolfson's ability was genuine and that it supports the likewise genuine experiments reported by medical doctor Jule Eisenbud with Ted Serios who was able to project mental images directly onto Polaroid film. During the lifetimes of Mrs. Wolfson and her psychiatrist husband Dr. William Q. Wolfson, there was agreement that information about the experiments would not be published. Though convinced of the reality of so-called psychic photography, Iris Owen cautioned that it is not caused by ghosts or spirits. Rather, it is likely a little understood ability of the human mind.

In 1994, the Owens retired and moved to Calgary, Alberta. In retirement, Iris Owen completed *My Many Lives* (2000) which provided an account of her life and the varied careers she pursued. They ranged from working as a British Armed Forces radio intercept officer on the Enigma team during World War II, to working as a nurse in a cancer radiotherapy clinic, to teaching a course on parapsychology at Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. In addition, she was a tireless community volunteer, serving on numerous committees in both England and Canada.

Until the 1990s, the Owens were active members of the British SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH and the AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH. While in England, they had also been members of the Cambridge University Society for Psychical Research.

Dr. George Owen died on 18 January 2003, in Calgary. In 2005, Mrs. Owen was interviewed by producer Donna Zuckerbrot for the television documentary *Conjuring Philip* (2007). Iris Owen passed away peacefully on 21 October 2009, also in Calgary.

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO has published [*Conjuring Up the Owens*](#) (1999) as a tribute to the Owens' multi-faceted careers. That compilation contains a detailed resume of Dr. Owen's work in traditional academe, as well as psychical research.

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Together George and Iris Owen made valuable contributions to the literature available on poltergeists and the group-PK effect. Their research suggests that some psychic phenomena are caused by little-understood abilities of the human mind, rather than by the spirits of the deceased.

Further Reading:

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