

# THE SCOLE EXPERIMENT

## THE SCOLE FILES

### **Robin Foy, A Tribute**

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[\*Witnessing The Impossible: The Diary of The Scole Experiment\*](#)

Also see [The Scole Blog](#)

#### **Remembering ‘possibly the most experienced and successful organizer and promoter of physical mediumship circles in the last century’.**

In this tribute to our friend and colleague, Robin Foy (1943-2022), we have attempted to provide an historical journey through a remarkable life dedicated to psychical research in pursuit of physical mediumship.

Robin was both an experienced psi practitioner and knowledgeable field investigator, his ‘other job’, for nearly half a century; a psychical research career that spanned more than a third of the 140-year existence of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), whose members investigated The Scole Experiment. His specialist book collection was extensive and he was well-read in the history of the subject. Robin’s aims and methods mirrored those of the SPR founders, including the collection and investigation of data and sitting through endless dull séances in the pursuit of scientific explanations.[1] Although not a Spiritualist in the religious sense, Robin sought to combine his special interest in physical mediumship and its ‘spiritualistic’ phenomena – in his view especially evidential because they can be experienced via the five senses of everyone present – with a scientific approach to their investigation. He strove to maintain a foot firmly in both camps in order to gather a body of scientific evidence for life after death in a lifelong effort to prove the existence of an afterlife. To achieve this end, he worked tirelessly to establish and spread a combined area of study he called *spiritual science*.

It appears that his five decades of dedicated psychical research into physical mediumship were considered fruitful by some senior researchers in the field. David Fontana, a former president of the SPR, said that physical phenomena could lead us to rethink some of the most cherished laws of science and, if this happens, history will rank Robin Foy alongside Lodge, Crookes, Conan Doyle and the other great investigators of the past.[2] Jeffrey Mishlove, winner of the 2021 Bigelow Institute’s ‘Best Evidence for Afterlife’ Essay Contest, describes Robin as ‘possibly the most experienced and successful organizer and promoter of physical mediumship circles in the last century’.[3]

We first met Robin when we attended a seminar given by the Scole Experimental Group (SEG) in September 1998. The SEG, co-founded by Robin, said it was involved in scientific research into physical mediumship and the afterlife. Robin was first to speak. A commanding presence at the podium, with his booming voice, he had little need for the microphone. The SEG were meeting twice-weekly to conduct experimental sessions in the cellar of seventeenth century Street Farmhouse, in the village of Scole, near Diss in Norfolk, where he

and his wife Sandra lived. In a jovial and down-to-earth manner, Robin related extraordinary paranormal events which had been happening in the cellar for five years, including: spirit lights whizzing around; photos appearing on unopened film rolls which had never been in a camera; and two-way communication with other dimensions through a machine. The phenomena the SEG witnessed in the early sessions were so unusual that prominent members of the SPR had been inspired to investigate. Robin proudly held up the 'Germanium Device for trans-dimensional communication', which one of the SPR investigators, electrical engineer Arthur Ellison, had supervised the construction of after receiving instructions as to its design from the engineers and scientists in a team of spirit communicators. The device apparently worked without a power source. Robin's talk was peppered with dates, facts, and measurements. The SPR investigators were already preparing a Scole report for specialist and scientific readers. Excited by Robin's fascinating presentation, we proposed writing a book for a general audience to the four members of the Scole group: Robin, Sandra, Alan, and Diana.

After the spirit team had been consulted about a book, we were invited to Scole. Robin greeted us warmly and enthusiastically at the front door. In the living room, he pointed out the original carved motto above the old fireplace, constructed only a few decades after the passing of William Shakespeare: 'Welcome Ever Smiles'. We certainly were made to feel welcome. Sandra plied us with numerous cups of tea, sandwiches, and delicious home-made cakes. Laughing loudly, Robin pointed to his ample waistline and said he could never resist his wife's wonderful baking. Robin impressed us with his encyclopaedic knowledge of psychical research. He reeled off names, facts, and figures at the drop of a hat. He showed us his extensive library, covering all aspects of Spiritualism and psychical research, which had taken him over twenty-five years to collect. Browsing, we saw it included works by Frederic Myers, Arthur Conan Doyle, and William Barrett. Robin proudly pointed out publications going back to the 1800s. A glass cabinet in the corner contained numerous *apports*—a wide variety of objects which were appearing spontaneously in the cellar with a loud thud during the Scole experiments. He showed us hundreds of audiocassette tapes on which he had meticulously recorded all the sessions. We also learned he was keeping a diary of everything as it happened. His aim in keeping such detailed records was to accumulate a vast and accurate volume of evidence, as in a court of law, so that the weight of such evidence might prove the case for the existence of an afterlife 'beyond reasonable doubt'.

A life closely connected to matters psychical had prepared Robin well for the events at Scole. He was born on 10 September 1943 in Blackpool, Lancashire, to a 'naturally psychic' mother who visited Spiritualist mediums and a logical and 'rather sceptical' father; an environment mirroring the two halves of his later psychical research self. Robin's parents indulged his healthy interest in ghost stories so that a birthday or Christmas meant the excitement of tearing open wrapping paper to reveal such titles as *Phantoms of the Night* or *Shane Leslie's Ghost Book*. The Foy family moved to Lincolnshire, where Robin had a happy childhood. After an education at Grimsby Grammar School, he joined the Royal Air Force and became a pilot and was stationed at RAF Hornchurch in Essex. He and his fellow airmen took full advantage of their free time to enjoy the local pubs. One Sunday afternoon, following lunch in the Officers' Mess, while resting alone and completely sober in his room, he heard a woman's voice speaking to him from mid-air, 'You can heal with your hands.' This experience was so convincing that he immediately rushed out to try healing his fellow airmen. After much ribbing, he learned the hard way to keep his own counsel in psi-related matters until he had evidence that other people had the same level of interest. Later in life, Robin did indeed go on to develop and practise his healing gift. While on leave at his parents' home, a woman's voice again spoke from mid-air to give him another message, 'You will marry Linda Mitchell.' Four years after this pronouncement, the prediction came true. Soon

after leaving the air force, now married and with a young family to support, Robin began his career as a sales executive in the paper manufacturing trade, in which he was destined to spend the rest of his working life.

In 1973, aged 30, Robin's life as a psychical researcher began. He felt drawn like a magnet to a newspaper advert 'as if it were printed in bold type'. It had been placed by Elmer Brown, who regularly shared sittings with two famous practitioners: independent direct voice medium, Leslie Flint; and 'Battling Bertha' Harris. Brown was seeking sitters for his recently depleted home circle. An interview led to Robin joining the Elmer Brown Circle, where, in that same year, he made his first connection with the SPR when he met and sat with future president, Alan Gauld.[4] Decades later, Gauld stated: 'I have known the leader of the Scole group for well over thirty years without finding any reason to regard him as anything other than totally sincere.'[5]

Robin continued to develop his mediumship and psychical research skills through regular attendance at sittings. In 1977, he met his second wife, Sandra, through a physical circle he had established in Romford. The couple married in April 1979. Their shared interest in genealogy led them to spend weekend breaks in the 'haunted' seventeenth century Scole Inn, from whose windows they first admired, and were drawn to, Street Farmhouse.

For the next decade, Robin and Sandra ran circles for the development of physical psychic phenomena with varying results. They helped Eileen Roberts, president of the Institute of Spiritualist Mediums (ISM), to establish and run a Home Circle Link, which embraced a number of member circles all over the world, with Robin and Sandra doing the bulk of the work for four years. During this period, they enjoyed meeting many overseas members when they travelled abroad.

In 1989, a spirit message received via independent voice, from a spirit communicator called 'Noah Zerdin', led Robin to found the Noah's Ark Society for Physical Mediumship (NAS) in April 1990. He would remain chairman until 1994, when he left to concentrate on his Scole experiments. In those four years, they achieved their main aim of restoring worldwide interest in physical mediumship and its phenomena, so that it could be developed in home circles around the world and once again be demonstrated regularly and safely to the public.[6]

When the Foys moved into Street Farmhouse in 1991, a cellar was soon set up for sittings, which Robin affectionately called the 'Scole Hole'. Robin and Sandra began building the Scole Home Circle and invited other groups to visit, including the NAS. At the end of August 1992, during a demonstration of traditional physical mediumship (using ectoplasm), something happened that would be forever etched in Robin's memory, because it gave him his ultimate proof of life after death:[7]

During the course of the séance, my father, who had passed into spirit in 1987, materialised quite solidly. I was able to embrace him, and I recognised his voice beyond a shadow of a doubt. Let's face it, who among us would not know their own father? We had been extremely close in life and were able to carry on a personal conversation during which my father spoke of things that only he and I in the world would know about. He gave me some very valuable advice about my health, which I immediately and wisely acted upon, as it proved to be extremely accurate when I called on my GP for confirmation the following day.

In order to develop the Scole Home Circle, Robin advertised in the 'Circles Seeking Sitters' section of the NAS monthly newsletter. Alan and Diana Bennett answered and attended their first sitting in January 1993. The Scole circle learned that their team of communicators were using a new form of 'creative energy' to power the Scole sessions rather

than the traditional ectoplasm. The communicating team wanted to conduct experiments across the divide with this energy. The circle agreed, becoming the Scole Experimental Group (SEG) in the process, and so 'The Scole Experiment' proper had begun. The SEG stated they were not Spiritualists, and did not wish their work to be connected with a religion—whether Spiritualism or any other denomination.[8] After more apports and a wide range of other physical phenomena, Robin, ever the keen sharer and educator, set up the New Spiritual Science Foundation (NSSF) with Sandra and the other members of the SEG to report to a wider audience on the events unfolding in the Scole Hole.

The first issue of the NSSF magazine, *The Spiritual Scientist* (December 1994), alerted SPR members to what was happening at Scole, through their association with PRISM (Psychical Research Involving Selected Mediums), a joint investigatory body, championed by Archie Roy, involving – harking back to the very earliest days of the SPR – members of both the SPR and the Spiritualists' National Union (SNU). The Scole spirit communicators had already said it was intended for the SEG to work with 'sympathetic scientists'. Robin was therefore over the moon when, in 1995, three SPR and PRISM members – Montague Keen, Arthur Ellison, and Ralph Noyes – began attending Scole sessions. After two sittings, David Fontana took the place of Noyes. Scole sessions were later attended by other SPR members, including Alan Gauld, Donald West, Bob Morris, Archie Roy, Bernard Carr, Tony Cornell, John Beloff, Melvyn Willin, Leslie Banks, Rosemary Dinnage, Ivor Grattan-Guinness, Rupert Sheldrake, and Ingrid Slack.[9]

In 1996, Robin published, *In Pursuit of Physical Mediumship*, an autobiography about his experiences to date. Reviewed by Mary Rose Barrington in the *JSPR*[10], the book explains how, and why, Robin was captivated by the direct voice productions of Leslie Flint, his communications with Winston Churchill, and how he devoted his spare time to expanding his experience and sharing it with others. On the back cover, Arthur Ellison describes Robin as an outstanding character in the Spiritualist movement whose pioneering research efforts in the field make fascinating reading. The book ends in 1994, when the SEG was beginning to get interesting results.

As word of the physical mediumship taking place at Scole spread, there was interest around the world from people who wished to set up their own group. Robin, together with Sandra and the Bennetts, published *A Basic Guide to the Development and Practice of The New Physical Psychic Phenomena Using Energy*, which is freely available for download online.[11]

After the Scole experiments ended unexpectedly in disappointing circumstances for everyone concerned in 1998, Robin was heartened when, in 1999, the SPR issued a detailed *Proceedings*, part of Volume 58, entitled *The Scole Report: An Account of an Investigation into the Genuineness of a range of Physical Phenomena associated with a Mediumistic Group in Norfolk, England*; in which the three principal investigators confirmed they had witnessed a wide range of phenomena, including evidence favouring the hypothesis of intelligent forces able to influence material objects, and to convey associated meaningful messages, both visual and aural, and were unable to detect any direct indication of fraud or deception.[12] Of course, in an organisation such as the SPR, which holds no corporate view, there were members who were less convinced by the same evidence, as illustrated by the doubts expressed in the contributions from Donald West, Tony Cornell, and Alan Gauld in the Appendices of the report. As a widely read student of psychical research, Robin understood this. However, in his view, some of the criticisms were unfounded, especially the oft-repeated claim that the whole experiment was conducted in complete darkness; since the evidence of his own experience, and the testimony of credible SPR witnesses, suggested the opposite. Robin was therefore very pleased when, in 1999, at the SPR's Scole Debate in London, Ivor Grattan-Guinness gave video witness testimony, subsequently added to the

archives by Monty Keen, relating to his experience catching balls of light which had mass and enough 'light power' to illuminate his face.[13]. In Robin's opinion, Ivor's 'fearless' interview – which may be the first recorded with an SPR member simultaneously crunching on an apple – about what he actually experienced, was 'very brave' given his academic status as a professor of the History of Mathematics and Logic.

For a non-member, Robin's contribution to the activities and interests of the SPR was considerable. Indirectly, his field work raised awareness of the SPR around the world and demonstrated that it is a learned organisation with no corporate view in which members can agree to radically disagree. In regard to the Scole case, whilst the circulation of *The Spiritual Scientist* and readership of the *Scole Report* were specialist and initially limited, Robin was delighted when our book for the general reader, *The Scole Experiment*, reached millions via coverage in national newspapers and magazines in the UK and as far afield as Germany and Japan. This book was written in association with Robin and the other members of the SEG, and in close collaboration with the three principal Scole investigators – Ellison wrote the Foreword, Fontana wrote the Afterword, and Keen contributed heavily to a chapter and acted as overall expert SPR consultant – who expressly asked us to include as much of the *Scole Report* in the book as feasible. Robin was not, however, so pleased, when, in advance of the report and book, staff journalist, Bryan Appleyard, wrote a long, critical, front-page article on Scole in *The Sunday Times Magazine*, which he thought was inaccurate.[14] Some SPR members were concerned that Appleyard had made the organisation look foolishly credulous and out of touch with reality.[15] Our own serialisation of the Scole experiments, covering the five years of Scole material in its entirety – including the UFO and extra-terrestrial phenomena – appeared in the *Daily Mail* shortly afterwards.[16] This also caused a bit of a stir and some consternation amongst SPR members. Robin's reaction to the hullabaloo was to smile sagely and say to us that, since all those things happened, they should all be reported on. Further controversy about Robin's Scole field work in association with SPR members inevitably continued in various contributions to this magazine.[17] Melvyn Willin's brief overview of 'The Scole Circle' can be found on *Psi Encyclopedia*. [18]

Through his tireless organization of mediumship circles, research efforts, books, magazines, and websites supporting mediums internationally, Robin became very well known in psychical research worldwide. After the experiments at Scole finished, he and Sandra visited medium, Marcello Bacci, in Italy, where they participated in his attempts to contact discarnate entities by radio. Robin thought there was evidence that members of the Scole team of communicators were coming through. The Bacci radio experiments would later be included in a documentary which generated considerable interest in Robin's ongoing research. In 2008, Robin published *Witnessing The Impossible*. This comprehensive diary of the Scole experiments, in which he records nearly every session the SEG conducted in detail, including 180 new types of physical phenomena observed – many in the presence of senior SPR members – is a further example of his dedication to meticulous documentation. A review by Guy Lyon Playfair, who observes that there 'never seems to have been a dull moment', can be found in the *JSPR*. [19] Jeffrey Mishlove's review says the book describes an amazing project, possibly constituting the greatest variety and intensity of unbelievable physical phenomena in the history of parapsychology and psychical research. [20] In September 2011, Robin featured in a documentary film, narrated by Donal MacIntyre, *The Afterlife Investigations: The Scole Experiments*. [21] This spread Robin's work (and indirectly that of the SPR) to more than a million viewers on *YouTube*. Tom Ruffles, as he helped out with the SPR website's inbox, regularly noticed emails requesting copies of the *Scole Report*. This led, in October 2011, to the SPR making the report available to a wider audience as a mass circulation paperback. [22] Needless to say, after a lifetime of striving to make spiritual

science more widely known and appreciated, Robin was thrilled that his psychical research work was getting such attention in these various ways around the world.

Robin's research activity involved a wide variety of people and took him to many countries, including Egypt, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the USA. On his travels, he met many prominent researchers, including Ernst Senkowski and Russell Targ. Along this rollercoaster ride of a journey, Robin also felt honoured to meet and work with a wide range of Spiritualists, mediums, and other assorted psi practitioners; those lay psychical researchers who, he regretted, were often under-credited and sometimes unfairly criticised. His opinion was that these people worked hard, often without financial reward, at their mediumship and other skills, thus potentially providing the actual material for investigation by the academics and scientists in the field. These psi practitioners included Leslie Flint, Alan and Diana Bennett, Gordon Higginson, John Squires, Brigitte Rix, Uwe and Beate Siegert, Brian Hurst, Geoffrey Jacobs, Paul McElhoney, Colin Fry, Stewart Alexander, David Thompson, Mavis King, Tom and Linda Anderson, the Yellow Cloud Circle in France, the Theatre School Circle in Streatham, Scott Milligan, Kai Muegge, Sandy Horsford, and Tom and Brenda Sawyer. Last year, two decades after the event, we filmed an interview with medium, Brenda Sawyer, now in her nineties, about her enlightening memories of attending the circle at Robin's home in Scole, where she and her husband Tom spoke evidentially to their son, Jim, who had been killed some years earlier whilst serving in the RAF.[23]

In 2007, the Foys retired to Formentera del Segura in Spain where, through their continuing psychical research activities, they met and formed a circle with German couple, Uwe and Beate Siegert. This led to Uwe's rapid development as a physical trance medium. Very soon their circle started to get tangible phenomena such as independent voice, apports, and spirit lights. This led to members of the Sociedad Científica de Investigación Psíquica (SCIP) attending a very evidential sitting which included an impressive range of phenomena: illuminated balls of light travelling around the room; touches which conveyed emotion; and the materialisation of a hand.[24] Robin hoped that this heralded the long-awaited return of something akin to the Scole phenomena. In the summer of 2021, the Foys and the Siegerts, now the Torcal Experimental Group (TEG), founded the Spiritual Science Founders Association (SSFA) and Robin and Sandra moved into its large new centre in the Torcal region, with a view to creating a permanent international facility for the practice and promotion of physical mediumship. Unfortunately, Robin's health worsened before the Torcal centre could be properly established and it had to be closed down.

Like many psychical researchers seeking evidence for psi, especially spiritualistic physical phenomena, Robin's disappointments and lows were many and various. He spent thousands of hours in sittings at which not very much, if anything at all, happened by way of evidence. Throughout his life, like other researchers before him, he experienced instances of hoaxing during sittings, when apparently genuine phenomena had been witnessed with the same medium both before and after the offending sitting: 'It's complicated.' Even in the face of the fierce criticism of such events spilling over in his direction, he appeared to endure all such disappointments with good grace, an open heart, and a 'we need to keep trying' attitude. Given the huge amount of research time he had spent in séance rooms around the world, and the evidence he had witnessed, he was especially disappointed by researchers who, having attended a sitting or two and spotted some sort of hoaxing behaviour, concluded that all the phenomena of physical mediumship must be faked. Before the Torcal disappointment, Robin went through the pain of the entirely unexpected cessation of the experiments at Scole. He had formed such a warm and close bond with the Scole communicators that he considered them to be part of his family and he felt the loss keenly.

On the other hand, the highs of a life dedicated to psychical research were also many and various. Robin felt privileged to have ‘met’ and worked with so many friends from the spirit world and ‘elsewhere’. These personalities included: Winston Churchill (a regular communicator with a special connection to Robin who presented as ‘Winnie’); William Wordsworth (who sent a poem on a film signed ‘WW’); Oliver Lodge (who presented using his middle name, ‘Joseph’); Arthur Conan Doyle (who transmitted a photograph of himself onto a sealed Polaroid film); Thomas Alva Edison (who transmitted modifications to the design of the Germanium Device onto a Kodachrome film roll signed ‘TAE’ which was in a sealed wooden security box, and then spoke through the machine once it was built); Mrs Emily Bradshaw (a well-spoken lady from the nineteenth century who was heavily involved in charity work); Hoo (who lived in China); John Paxton (an evolved spirit entity who experienced an earth life many hundreds of years ago); Manu (possibly an Inca from Peru – Manu and his Victorian child helpers brought apports to Scole on a regular basis); Patrick McKenna (a jovial Irish priest with a liking for Guinness and cigars); Raji (a prince who belonged to a caste of ancient Hindu warriors); Charlie Small Boy (an associate Raji brought along to public sittings to pat sitters on the head); Reg Lawrence (‘energy voice expert’); Edward Matthews (an army officer during World War I); White Cloud and Stargazer (Native Americans); Blue and Blue Two (extra-terrestrials who transmitted moving images of themselves onto video film in a completely dark cellar [25] – Blue also manifested physically); and Varren-Here-Ic (a high-ranking ‘stellar friend’, who spoke through the Germanium Device from a far-distant dimension to explain why the Scole experiments had to end). ‘Never a dull moment’ indeed!

When we reached out to people for their memories of Robin, we learned just how much he was held in high regard. Alan and Diana Bennett were highly impressed with his dedication, attention to detail, and boundless enthusiasm for field experiments. When British physical medium, Brian Russell, needed help establishing a trance circle for physical phenomena, Robin encouraged the group members at every step in the process, advising them to keep notes and recordings of everything that happened. He was always willing to listen to everyone and to guide others. Beate and Uwe Siegert have fond memories of Robin. They loved hearing his deep, tuneful voice singing his favourite songs, such as ‘Run Rabbit Run’, during sittings and fondly remembered the joy he brought to the proceedings. They were impressed that Robin had a ‘very experienced ear’ and most of the time he was the first to hear a new voice or sound in the room. It was always a great honour for them to sit with ‘the legendary Robin Foy’ and his wife Sandra. French medium, Brigitte Rix, was impressed by Robin’s gift as a public speaker, his modesty, honesty, and empathy with his audience; and his immense knowledge of physical mediumship and all aspects of inter-dimensional communication. She still remembers the excitement of visiting the Scole cellar and experiencing amazing phenomena. Robin’s work proved to her that no one dies and that there are worlds and existence beyond this physical universe: ‘I, too, witnessed the impossible. Thank you, Robin and Sandra.’

Robin endeavoured to give full credit to those he worked with. One example of this was the dedication to the Scole trance mediums he wrote in the copy of *Witnessing The Impossible* that he presented to them: ‘For Diana and Alan – without whom there would have been no Scole Experiment’. He said to the Siegerts, ‘the whole circle is the medium’, thus confirming his conviction that all group members contribute to the energy of the session and the manifestation of any phenomena achieved.

Robin passed away in Spain on 10 April 2022. During a lifetime dedicated to spiritual science, he did his best to remind the psychical research community that accomplished mediums and committed circles are absolutely vital to field investigations. He looked forward

to the day when psychical research would be widely accepted as a respectable subject worthy of scientific investigation, just as much as physics, chemistry, or biology.

It is likely that Robin Foy will continue to contribute to psychical research in the future through his wide-ranging legacy. A short time before he passed, we received an email from Robin asking if we could help him preserve, for future students of psychical research, his extensive collection of books and booklets, with his first suggestion being the SPR. We agreed to take this on. A friend and colleague of Robin's, science officer of the SSFA, Alan Middleton, kindly organised the transport, at his own expense, of the 28-box collection from southern Spain to the UK, where another friend, Brigitte Rix, sorted and listed the 1,000 or so items. The SPR then arranged to take custody of the collection. Robin also asked us to publish his book, *Witnessing The Impossible*, his complete diary of the Scole experiments, in digital format, so that more people can study every one of the many hundreds of sessions chronologically and in detail. We have prepared this eBook to fulfil Robin's request. In addition, hundreds of audiotapes from the Scole Experiment sessions are being digitised by Alan Middleton after Robin expressed his wish that making this audiotape evidence freely available may provide researchers with a deeper understanding as to how the five-year, 500-session, 1,000-hour, multi-country, psychical research experiment was conducted. One of these tapes reveals how, rather than ceasing the visits from SPR members to avoid being 'exposed', the SEG and the spirit communicators were working in closed sessions towards being able to invite the SPR investigators back for open sessions which could be captured on video (and so fulfil a particular request the investigators had made). As per the Leslie Flint audio archive, the Scole audiotapes may provide interesting learning opportunities for present and future students of psychical research.

We would like to leave the last word to Robin. When asked if he believed in life after death, his reply, based on nearly fifty years of dedicated psychical research, confirms that he had come to a conclusion: 'No, I don't believe in an afterlife. I *know* it exists...'

## NOTES

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