

THE BOURNEMOUTH POLTERGEIST

by CYRIL PERMUTT

1. SUMMARY

This is a report of the poltergeist activity which took place in the Bournemouth home of the Burden family during August 1981.

It was written after I had investigated the scene of the activity, No. 37 Abbott Road, Winton, Bournemouth, with my research assistant Ian Cipin of Northampton and spent considerable time with Mr. Burden and after I had spoken to or corresponded with most of the people involved.

The poltergeist phenomena had stopped by the time that Ian and I arrived at the Burden home on 24 August 1981 and this report is based on mainly Mr. and Mrs. Burden's account of the happenings, amplified and verified by the evidence of the clergyman Dr. Frederick C. Oliver, the Burden's social worker Tina Weir, the police officers Sergeant Alan Wood and Police Constable Graham Joyce, the Burden's neighbour Colin Barber and David Haith a *Bournemouth Times* reporter who all witnessed various stages of the activity, and several of the other people involved.

2. BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

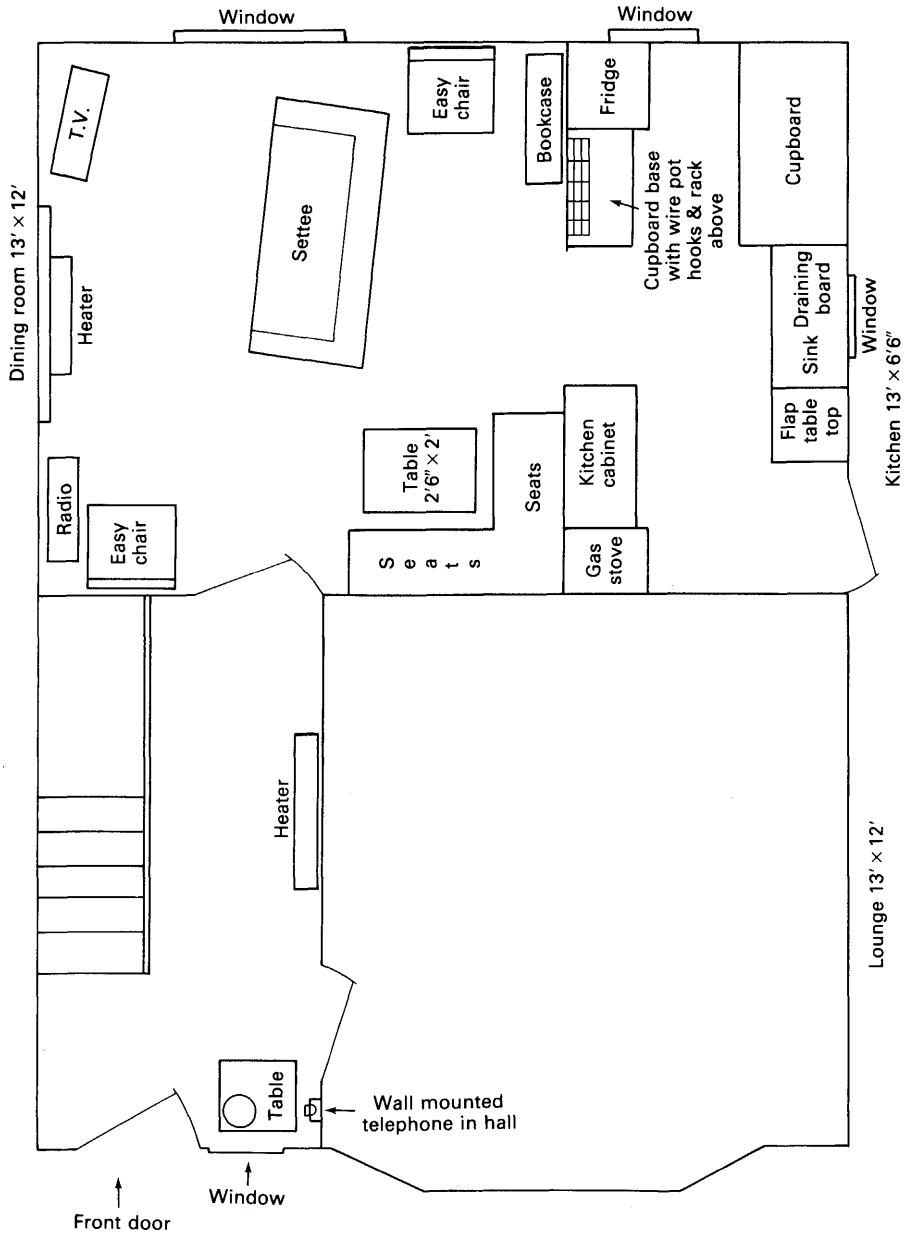
The Burden family consists of Mr. Charles Burden, an intelligent and articulate 62 year old self-employed window cleaner, who seems to be a very steady and good natured man, 45 year old Mrs. Catherine Burden, who suffers from multiple sclerosis but is nevertheless a capable woman, their 17 year old adopted daughter Deborah and their 8 year old foster son Bradley who, although a retarded child, is a strong healthy and friendly boy; and the household is completed by a 13 year old black Labrador called 'Panda' and a black cat.

Mr. and Mrs. Burden also have a married daughter Noreen, who looked after Bradley for a while when they moved out of their house after the disturbances.

The care and concern which led Mr. and Mrs. Burden to adopt and foster children says much for their character.

Ian Cipin and I called at 37 Abbott Road at 10.30 a.m. on 24 August 1981 and met Mr. Burden who had just returned home. He invited us to inspect the house where he was fitting new carpet in the living room and tidying up and dusting in preparation for his family's return to their home which they had left in fear of further outbreaks of poltergeist activity, and told me that his daughter, who had been staying with their next door neighbour since they had all moved out of their home, had returned each day to bathe and take fresh clothing. He told me that she had not been afraid of the 'ghost' and that nothing out of the ordinary had occurred during her visits.

The furniture, ornaments, pictures and household utensils that had been flying about the rooms during the outbreak had been replaced and Mr. Burden showed us where they had originally been standing, demonstrating how they had flown about the room and gave us a detailed and graphic account of the events that had taken place.



GROUND FLOOR 37 ABBOTT ROAD WINTON

The outbreak of poltergeist activity began on the morning of Friday, 14 August 1981 when Mr. Burden arose at his usual time of 5 a.m. and noticed that the whole house was unusually chilly and that their usually quiet black labrador dog would not stop barking. When the dog did quieten down some time later Mr. Burden dismissed the incident as just the dog barking at cats, and as the temperature of the house slowly returned to normal he thought no more of it.

The active physical poltergeist phenomena began some three hours later at about 9 a.m. when Mr. Burden and Deborah had left for work and Mrs. Burden was alone in the house with Bradley.

Bradley was playing in front of Mrs. Burden who was doing some housework in the kitchen when crockery commenced crashing to the kitchen floor behind her. Pots and pans flew through the air and cups and plates leaped off the draining board and shattered on the kitchen floor. Startled, Mrs. Burden ran out into the living room with Bradley close behind her. There the television set began to jump about, the loose top of the dining table jumped up and down, more objects began to fly about and everything seemed to be falling over.

The television set leaped up and fell over, all the things on top of it fell off and ornaments and photographs leaped off the radiogram and off the shelves above the fireplace.

Mrs. Burden said that the 2 ft x 2 ft 6 in top of the dining table flew around the dining room and an 8 in by 6 in round biscuit tin whizzed past her head from where it had been standing on the bookcase in the back corner of the dining room, diagonally across the room to the opposite corner as she stood petrified.

At this Bradley, who had been standing with his arms tight around her, let go and ran out shouting for help.

Neighbours hearing the cries came in and telephoned for Mr. Burden who rushed from his work and arrived back home at about 9.30 a.m.

When he returned home Mr. Burden called on his friend and neighbour Mr. Colin Barber next door at number 39 Abbott Road and asked him to come into number 37 and help. They both noticed that the house had become very cold again.

Mr. Barber suggested that Mr. Burden should telephone the police. They were standing in the hall with Bradley next to them and as Mr. Burden lifted the telephone receiver a large paraffin heater standing only a few inches from him was flung across the width of the small hall crashing against the far wall, and then the table below the telephone began to shake throwing a flower pot and ornaments to the ground.

Mr. Burden told me that it then suddenly went very cold and that for the first time he became very frightened.

The two police officers who came in response to Mr. Burden's phone call noticed the same sensation of extreme coldness in the house.

Sgt Alan Wood said that the temperature seemed to have dropped at least ten or fifteen degrees as soon as they arrived in the house and Police Constable Graham Joyce said that he heard Mrs. Burden cry out that it was getting cold again and then heard a terrific crash from the kitchen. PC Joyce said, 'There was a hell of a bang and then, as I came in the kitchen, a cabinet was falling to the ground.'

PC Joyce suggested that they consult a priest and arranged for 95 year old Dr.

Frederick C. Oliver, retired assistant priest at St. Albans Church, to be brought to the house.

The police car picked up Dr. Oliver at his home 43 Richmondwood Road and brought him to 37 Abbott Road, where he arrived just before 11 a.m.

When he arrived in the house he and the policemen saw the bookcase lean away from the wall and begin to topple over, and Dr. Oliver stopped it from falling by supporting it and pushing it back with his walking stick; but a plate and a dish on one of the shelves fell to the ground. This was witnessed by the two police officers, Mr. Burden and Mr. Barber. Bradley, who was in the room with them, ran out the room in fright. Dr. Oliver blessed the house. He called on the 'evil spirits' to leave the house, asked everyone to join in the Lords Prayer and comforted the family before leaving the house.

Dr. Oliver did not conduct an official service of exorcism at the house as he told me that only the Reverend Harold Wilkins has the necessary training and the authority of the Bishop of Salisbury to conduct exorcisms in that area.

By the time that Dr. Oliver was taken home by the police at 12 o'clock the house had been made tidy again. The broken crockery and glass was swept up and put out into the dustbin, the sound china and glassware and the kitchen utensils put back into their usual places and the rest of the furniture, ornaments and photographs in the hall, dining room and kitchen replaced into position.

I was not permitted to interview the two police officers personally, or to see their official reports, but I was assured by a senior police officer at the local Police Station that the newspaper reports had quoted them correctly and had given an accurate account of what they had seen.

There seems to have been no directional influence in the poltergeist activity. Items from both the left hand and right hand sides of the narrow kitchen were dislodged and crashed to the floor in the centre.

Similarly in the dining room, the television and radiogram on the left and the articles on them and on the shelves above the heater on the left wall were thrown to the right, whilst the bookcase at the far right leaned face forward to the left, spilling items from on or in it to the floor, and the biscuit tin standing on it, as we have seen, flew diagonally across the room to the left nearside corner, and the loose top of the dining table standing in the near right hand corner jumped up and down and finally flew around the room in a clockwise direction.

Mr. Albert White, Vice-President of the Bournemouth Spiritualist Church, Bath Road, Bournemouth, who was called to the house by Tina Weir the Social worker, and had arrived at the Burdens' home at 11 o'clock with several other mediums, held a seance at about midday, 14 August 1982 when a friend of the family seemed to be 'partly controlled' but nothing positive took place.

Most of those present had left by late afternoon and the house remained quiet for the rest of the day and all that night, but a second very similar outbreak of Poltergeist activity occurred at 10.45 a.m. the next morning, Saturday, 15 August 1981 when all the family were present.

This second morning of flying furniture and crashing china and glass was witnessed by several other people, including Tina Weir, the Burden family's social worker, who told me she was certain that the articles she saw flying about and the havoc that was being caused was not being done physically by any of the people present.

Although Tina Weir gave me a vivid verbal account of what she had seen and assured me that no one present with her had physically moved or thrown any of the objects she saw flying around I was unable to obtain a written statement, interview, or even telephone conversation with her again. This, however, was for personal reasons (which were later passed on to me in confidence) and was not connected with the poltergeist activity.

The activity quietened down as the morning progressed and Mr. White, who called again at about midday to hold a second seance, saw only the aftermath of the outbreak and witnessed no activity himself, although he and all those present again remarked on the icy cold atmosphere that pervaded the house.

At this second seance Mr. White, who was the medium, was first controlled by his own control and then by a succession of other unidentified entities, and after a while a little boy who said his name was 'Ian' came through.

He said that he often played in the garden of 37 Abbott Road with Bradley (the Burdens retarded eight year old foster son).

Mr. Burden confirmed to me that Bradley had said on many occasions that he had been in the garden playing football or riding his bicycle with his friend 'Ian', although it has been observed that he had been alone at the time, and that Bradley had often been heard speaking to an 'Ian' whilst apparently playing on his own. Questioned later Bradley confirmed that he had a friend 'Ian' he played with in the garden.

Mr. White returned to the Burdens' home and held a further seance at about 9 p.m. at which a young man who said he was 'Ian' came through. After a while the voice of 'Ian' was again heard calling out 'Grandma' and he conversed with his grandma for a while until she faded away. 'Ian' was then asked how he could have been a little boy in the morning and a young man by the evening, he replied that where he was time ran differently and that 'you were what you thought that you were'.

He said that he, 'Ian', had been twenty-two years old when he had died in the locality and has returned to play with Bradley because he, 'Ian', had also been an unhappy backward child.

As this was happening those present noticed that the icy atmosphere that pervaded the ground floor of the house was changing and the icy feeling gradually faded away, but before the seance ended the medium's control warned that further happenings might still occur.

Local people later reported that a young drug addict called Ian had indeed died in the area some two years previously. David Haith, the *Bournemouth Times* reporter who investigated this case and was present at both seances, confirmed this but pointed out to me that there actually was an Ian, a young boy who lives nearby with a bicycle, whom Bradley played with, but that Mrs. Burden had also told him that Bradley appeared to talk sometimes to an imaginary Ian when alone in the garden.

David Haith had arrived at the house on Saturday morning as the outbreak of poltergeist activity was dying away and only saw the slight residual activity of one or two small objects moving apparently of their volition but could not be certain of this.

Another psychic, Mrs. M. Jeffrey, who classes herself as a 'white witch', told me that when she visited the house she was reluctant to enter as she 'felt' a

presence, but when she went in she found that it was not a ghost but 'a terrific force of energy coming from the air in the room; it felt like a high wind as if on the edge of a storm which was dying down.' She said 'I picked up a candlestick holder which had been thrown and several other items which had been thrown with force across the room. I knew straight away, I knew that this force was from the little boy which the couple were fostering called Bradley.'

Mrs. Jeffrey went on to tell me that something terrible had happened to Bradley when he was younger and that this had stuck in his mind until that day and that this was the cause of the disturbance.

This is an interesting statement as poltergeist phenomena have been compared with certain types of hysteria in that the patient is unaware of the hidden cause of the illness which is locked away in the unconscious, the hysterical attacks being just a release from the pressure in the depths of the mind.

The outbursts of poltergeist activity it is suggested are not an illness or affectation themselves but rather a cure, the letting off of steam so as to release the internal pressure, and are therefore self limiting (Owen, 1964).

On some occasions when people involved in poltergeist activity have moved away from their houses the phenomena have moved with them and reappeared in their new homes. In the case of this outbreak there is no evidence of the activity following Bradley or any other member of the family when they moved away from their home or of it re-occurring when they later returned and took up residence there again, although as Bradley was the only one present during all of the outbreaks of activity there seems to be no doubt that he was the epicentre of the phenomena.

No further disturbances have occurred at No. 37 Abbott Road since not have any been reported from the home where Bradley is now living.

The fact that Bradley is a retarded child may have some relevance to this case as there are a number of examples in the literature of poltergeist cases in which a mentally retarded child has been reported as having been the focus of an outbreak of poltergeist activity (Podmore, 1896-97; P.P.A., 1969; Roll, 1976).

The customary feeling of sudden unaccountable coldness which often accompanies paranormal or psychic phenomena was remarked upon by many of those who were present during the activity or visited the house soon afterwards, but no measurement of the temperatures or temperature fluctuations was made.

As so often happens none of the witnesses of these manifestations thought of taking photographs of them as they were occurring, so no physical record other than photographs of the results of the pandemonium exists.

Although Ian Cipin and I used automatic electronically controlled 35 mm cameras during our visit to 37 Abbott Road on 24 August 1981 many of the photographs were inexplicably underexposed although theoretically this is impossible with the dedicated flash guns used.

Anomalies of the normal photographic processes have been associated with various kinds of psychic phenomena and this should emphasise how important it is for all psychical researchers to carry a loaded camera on all investigations and to be prepared to use it on every possible occasion.

Abbott Road is a quiet residential road with little or no heavy through traffic that might cause vibrations. No earth tremors were reported or noticed in the area at the time. There is no surface water in the area and dowsing does not

indicate any underground streams in the vicinity of the house.

Mr. and Mrs. Burden have since sold No. 37 Abbott Road and moved away from the area.

ASSESSMENT OF CASE:

Although as so often happens when investigating spontaneous psychical events no manifestations occurred whilst I was at 37 Abbott Road, the reliability of the witnesses in this case shows that the poltergeist activity involving forces strong enough to move heavy pieces of furniture about did take place and that there was no normal explanation of the phenomena.

As in most cases of poltergeist activity, although bric-a-brac, household articles and items of furniture often of considerable weight were thrown about no one was injured as a result of the sometimes frenzied activity which was mostly aimed at creating mischief.

Unlike many paranormal and psychical phenomena, which usually occur in darkness, this (again as is the case with most poltergeist outbreaks) occurred during daylight hours.

One must always allow for the fact that reports often vary from the actual facts as witnesses forget some details and colour others in the course of time, but even allowing for this there is still a consistency in the evidence in this case and by continual addition to the literature of outbreaks of poltergeist activity each report of this nature provides further evidence for future researchers.

Modern American usage is gradually replacing the word poltergeist (derived from two German words *polter* meaning noise and *geist* meaning spirit) with the phrase recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (RSPK) but in this report I have retained the older more succinct expression poltergeist as this is how the outbreak was referred to in all the contemporary accounts and newspaper articles.

REFERENCES

- Owen, A. R. G. *Can we explain the poltergeist?* New York: Garrett Publications, 1964.
 Podmore, F. Poltergeists. *Proc SPR*, 12, 90-95, 1896-97.
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 Roll, William G. *The Poltergeist*. Wyndham Publications, 1976.

Note: The Editor has in his possession copies of six signed documents from witnesses plus miscellaneous photographs and cuttings from local newspapers etc.—*Editor*.

49 Cranbourne Gardens,
 London NW11 0H4