

Focus on:

Research

My name is Fil Kinnersley, and I'm a research student at the University of Northampton, doing a PHD in Parapsychology, the study of 'paranormal' phenomena.

Initially as a nurse, and then later as an anthropology student, I came into contact with a lot of different views and beliefs on the issue of life after death, and over the years, I became increasingly interested in the areas of human experience that the current scientific views don't seem to be able to explain, such as after-death communications, or intuitive knowing. I finally had the opportunity to pursue this interest, and, for my PhD, I am doing research into the early stages of the process of becoming a Spiritualist Medium.

This research builds on some work done on Spiritualist Mediumship by Dr. Liz Roxburgh, who interviewed Spiritualist mediums in 2011, and found that, although they had experiences which might have been difficult to deal with, such as hearing voices that nobody else could hear, or seeing things that others couldn't see, their mental health seemed to be comparatively good. This highlighted the fact that relatively little is known about the inner experiences of the process of developing Spiritualist mediumship skills and abilities, and this is the focus of my research. A lot of research up till now has focused on 'proving' whether or not communication with the deceased is possible, but I am hoping to learn about people's experiences as developing mediums, from their point of view.

The first stage in the research was for me to join a Spiritualist open circle, so that I could become familiar with the vocabulary and the activities, as preparation for interviewing people who had recently joined a circle. Then Covid hit! Luckily, I was able to join Cathy Leigh-Tsoukalas's online 'First Steps' attunement group via the SNUi. I joined as a participant in order to gain first-hand knowledge, and intended to stay for about six months, but it proved to be a fascinating

experience, and with Cathy's support I have continued to attend the group for my own interest. I've also recently had the opportunity to join the Westbury Park Spiritualist Church open circle for a few meetings, which has given me the experience of attending a circle in person. The next stage in the research project is an online survey. The aim of the survey is to get an idea of why people decide to try to develop their mediumship (for example, if it was mainly out of interest, or whether it was prompted by any previous experiences they may have had), and also to get an idea of their experiences prior to embarking on their Spiritualist mediumship journey. So the survey is for people in the early stages of developing their Spiritualist mediumship (those who have joined a circle or online group or class within the last two years), and it includes questions about people's background

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and beliefs, and any prior experiences they may have had, and reactions to these.

The survey also contains the option for people who are near to the beginning of their mediumship journey (those who first joined a circle or group within the last 12 months or so) to sign up for the final stage of my research, as I am looking for people who might be willing to be interviewed, hopefully three times, over the course of 10-12 months, about their experience of the development process. This doesn't assume that the person will experience any major development changes within this time, but it will help to construct a picture of the ways in which

people experience the development process. The interviews could be done in person, or via the internet, depending on which is easiest. This is quite an exciting time for research into mediumship and there is a lot of interest in the subject. The results of this research will be published in academic journals, and will hopefully contribute to a greater understanding of the process of mediumship from the medium's point of view, something that I think is very important; I don't think that mediumship can be properly understood just from looking 'from the outside'.

So, I am looking for people who might like to take part in this research! You can do this either just by filling in the survey, or by doing the survey and, potentially, leaving contact details so that you can find out about the interviews. The survey is anonymous, and takes about 20-40 minutes to complete, depending on the amount of detail you want to include. You will have the option to save what you've done and return to it later. The first page is an information page, which explains how the data from the survey will be stored and used, and gives contact details for any further information. All the questions are optional, except the first question, which indicates that you are happy to proceed with the survey. You can also end the survey at any point, if you wish to. There is a link to the survey at the end of this article; if you have any questions at all, I would be happy to answer them, or to discuss the research project in general – my email address is fil.kinnersley@northampton.ac.uk.

My supervisors for this project are Professor Chris Roe, whom some of you may know from his talks at the Arthur Findlay College, and Dr. Glenn Hitchman, and they can also be contacted with questions about my research (chris.roe@northampton.ac.uk, glenn.hitchman@northampton.ac.uk). Link to the survey: <https://northampton.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/mediumship-development-survey>

