

# Hans Holzer

Hans Holzer (1920-2009) was an Austrian-born American author of books on occult and parapsychological subjects. He carried out paranormal investigations, notably of the Amityville haunting, but his claims were viewed with suspicion by some other parapsychologists.

## Life and Career

Hans Holzer was born in Vienna in 1902. His family fled to New York in 1938 when Austria was annexed to Germany. There he studied at Columbia University and also became captivated by show-business, writing musical sketches and reviews. He later claimed to have a PhD from the London College of Applied Science, but this was disputed.<sup>1</sup> He 'went on to teach parapsychology at the New York Institute of Technology'.<sup>2</sup> In 1962 he married Countess Catherine Genevieve Buxhoeveden, said to be a distant relative of Catherine the Great of Russia.

## Psychical Research

Holzer wrote more than 140 books on paranormal subjects. Calling himself a 'ghost hunter' Holzer investigated haunted houses and recorded the details in his many books (see below). His most famous investigation, carried out with Ethel Johnson-Meyers, a medium, concerned alleged hauntings and poltergeist activity at Amityville, which spawned best-selling books and horror films.

Holzer also wrote about reincarnation, claiming to remember a past life in which he was at the Battle of Glencoe in 1692 in Scotland, and another in which he was a Wiccan high priest.<sup>3</sup>

He appeared frequently on television programmes describing his experiences and eventually hosted his own US television show *Ghost Hunter*.<sup>4</sup>

## Controversy

Joe Nickell, a sceptic investigator, disputed the legitimacy of the sources Holzer used.<sup>5</sup> Peter Underwood, a British ghost hunter, considered Holzer's Amityville findings to be 'erroneous'.<sup>6</sup>

Holzer's book *Window to the Past* received a scathing report in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, which found his treatment of his historical sources to be 'so unsatisfactory ... as to cast considerable doubt on the objectivity and reliability of his work as a whole'.<sup>7</sup>

## Selected Books

*Ghost Hunter* (1963). Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.

*Psychic Investigator* (1968). New York: Hawthorn Books.

*Psychic Photography: Threshold of a New Science?* (1969). London: Souvenir Press.

*Window To the Past - Exploring History through ESP* (1970). London: Leslie Frewin.

*The Lively Ghosts of Ireland* (1970). London: Wolfe Publishing Ltd.

*Life after Death: The Challenge and the Evidence* (1970). New York: Dell Publishing.

*The Truth about ESP* (1974). New Romney, Kent: Bailey Brothers & Swinfen.

*The Handbook of Parapsychology* (1975). New York: Manor Books.

*The Amityville Curse* (1981). London: Futura Publications.

*Ghosts of Old Europe* (1992). Dorchester: Dorset Press.

*Tales at Midnight: True Stories from Parapsychology Casebooks and Journals* (1994). Philadelphia: Courage Classics.

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## Literature

*Fortean Times* (2009). Obituaries. *Fortean Times* 251, July, 28-29.

Green, H.J.M. (1970). Review of *Windows to the Past*, by H. Holzer. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 45, 428-31.

Grimes, W. (2009). *New York Times*. 29 April, 2009.

Nickell, J. (2006). [Ghost Hunters](#). *Skeptical Inquirer* 30/5. [Web page – subscribers only]

Underwood, P. (2009). [Obituary](#). *The Guardian* 18 June, 2009.

## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) *Fortean Times* (2009), 29.
- [2.](#) Grimes (2009).
- [3.](#) Grimes (2009).
- [4.](#) Underwood (2009).
- [5.](#) Nickell (2006).
- [6.](#) Underwood (2009).
- [7.](#) Green (1970), 431.