

OBITUARY

KENNETH GRAHAM DRINKWATER 1968–2026



Kind, intelligent, and a constant source of humour—what better qualities could a life hold? Dr Ken Drinkwater passed away unexpectedly, 8 July 2026.

He attended Loreto Sixth Form College (1986–1989), Manchester. Before pursuing a career in psychology and parapsychology, he initially worked as a painter and decorator, and went on to work at Cable & Wireless. He later gained bachelor's (2001), master's (2007), and doctoral degrees (2017), all from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), with a focus on paranormal beliefs. His viva examiners for the PhD were past and present presidents of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), Professors Chris Roe and Caroline Watt.

On the podcast 'Club Paranormal (Truth be Told)' in 2021, Ken featured along with his close friend (sidekick/partner in crime), colleague and PhD supervisor, Professor Neil Dagnall. They both outlined the field of parapsychology and how their involvement began. As Neil explained:

Even from a very early age [we both had a general interest in the paranormal] together with influences like watching ... the emergence of Amityville, for example, and being gripped by that story as it actually unfolded as a book in the 1970s. And then it was in the late 90s we had a course at Manchester Metropolitan University

which was parapsychology. Now the two people who were running it, they left within a short period of time. Which meant we had a choice, either I took over the course, or the course didn't run. And we had students who were interested, I was interested, so we jumped into that void, and then a few years later Ken joined, and we've been teaching it ever since in different guises. (Club Paranormal (Truth Be Told, 2021)

It is most fortunate that Ken did bits of media and podcasts, as we now have some lasting memories and lectures from him for people to share in his knowledge and personality.

Ken had a long-time association with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), which included publishing in the journal. However, he officially joined the society in April 2018, attending that year's conference in Newcastle and the following year in Leicester. He was also a regular attendee of the BIAL Foundation conference held in Porto. His publication record with colleagues from MMU is an impressive constant stream of outputs. These primarily focused on human beliefs and the application of validated scales. His ResearchGate profile alone lists 219 outputs. Uniquely for Ken, one of his final collaborations was a paper this year on the topic of survival, which lends support to the idea that consciousness may persist outside of the body during clinical death (Escolà-Gascón et al., 2026).

I regularly attended MMU from 2015 onwards. During that time, Ken introduced me to the various Parapsychology Society (Student Union) leads that they had over the years, notably Claire Elliott and then Becky Roberts. These events would involve talks at the MMU Brooks Building and typical trips to the pub, or, indeed, talks in the pub. At the pub, I saw Ken give various talks on conspiracy theories in psychology, especially the John F. Kennedy assassination, for which he was incredibly knowledgeable. It was a joy to watch him inspire the students and throw a little light humour into any talk he gave. With his colleagues at MMU, he also held ghost-hunting events for the students at Ordsall Hall, Withington Baths, the old Hotspur Press, and over in the Netherlands at a spiritualist HQ and a panopticon prison. This was all in aid of teaching the students about field investigation. And indeed the various anomalistic psychological explanations to look out for, which could lead people to think they have encountered haunting activity—and could anything go on beyond that?

As part of that interest, he contributed as editor to the publication of two substantial textbooks in anomalistic psychology and social science research methods. The first being *Ghosted!*, an anthology co-authored by Dr Brain Lythe, Dr Jim Houran, Professor Dagnall, and Dr Ciaran O'Keeffe, with a foreword and afterword by Professor Chris French and Loyd Auerbach, respectively (Lythe et al., 2021). And just last year, *Applied Cognitive Psychology: A Case Study Approach*, with long time colleagues from MMU Dr Andrew Denovan and Professor Dagnall (Denovan et al., 2025).

Outside of MMU, Ken was a regular attendee of the Exceptional Experiences and Consciousness Studies research group at the University of Northampton, often driving from Manchester to Northampton and back for the evening's catch-up. In more recent times, Ken and Neil were often on webcam together, presenting papers to the Anomalous Beliefs and Experiences Research Group (ABERG) run by Claire Murphy-Morgan of Northumbria University Newcastle. A meeting of the ABERG on 9 September discussed and celebrated Ken's life and work.

My lasting memories of Ken are not so much his work but his kindness. We have had many pub lunches together, but also many telephone calls. We were good enough friends to have heart-to-heart conversations about any challenging life events we faced. You couldn't ask for more in a good friend. I can't imagine Neil without Ken, as they really were a working duo, bouncing ideas, writing, humour and constant mockery off each other—the strongest of friendships, and I'm glad I got to witness that between them on many occasions at MMU.

The funeral ceremony took place at Chester Crematorium Chapel, in Ken's hometown, 31 July. His life was celebrated with a full audience of family, friends, colleagues at MMU, and noted figures in parapsychology such as Professor Dagnall, Dr Denovan, and Dr Fabrizio Cocchiarella, and myself. He is survived by his partner Judith, his stepbrother Mark, his stepfather, and the many friends who adored Ken's company.

In writing this piece for Ken, and SPR members, I read sections of his PhD thesis. It's apparent how important Ken's connection was to his late mother. In the sadness and grief of losing Ken so soon and indeed unexpectedly, some comfort could be taken from the thought that he is reunited with his mother. To love and to be loved is the most precious thing we have.

In Dr Ken Drinkwater's own words:

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my mum, Ann. I thank her for supporting me so unselfishly throughout my life, especially during the last nine years. She was always so positive, supportive, loving, and even during her prolonged illness made me feel special. She was the best mum, and is so sadly missed. Thanks mum I love you, always. (Drinkwater, 2017, p. 3)

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