**Report on AHSSSE/SMN conference, 27th June 2015:**

The Scientific and Medical Network joined with the Alister Hardy Society for the Study of Spiritual Experience in an Open Dialogue on the theme, *Science, Religion and Spirituality: Moving towards a Post-Materialist Paradigm?* at the Catholic Chaplaincy in St Aldates, Oxford on Saturday 27th June 2015. The speakers were Prof. Bernard Carr, Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy at Queen Mary University and Chairman of the Scientific and Medical Network, and Prof. Jeff Astley, Hon. Professor, Department of Theology and Religion and Professional Fellow of St. Chads College Durham University and Alister Hardy Professor of Religious and Spiritual Experience at Glyndwr University, Wrexham. The day was opened by Rhonda Riachi and Rowena Rudkin, the Chairs of the AHSSSE Oxford & Cotswold Group and London Group, who welcomed the speakers, the chairs for the day, Dr. Peter Fenwick and Andrew Burns, and guests.

The conference was based on a report, a *Manifesto for a Post-Materialist Science,* which resulted from the findings of a group of internationally known scientists from a variety of scientific fields who had come together to challenge the materialist worldview at an Inter-national Summit on Post-Materialist Science in February 2014. This summary report asserted that mind represents an aspect of reality as primordial as the physical world, is fundamental in the universe, and cannot be derived from matter and reduced to anything more basic; that minds are apparently unbounded, and may unite in ways suggesting a unitary one Mind that includes all individual, single minds; that the evidence suggests the survival of consciousness following bodily death - and “that scientists should not be afraid to investigate spirituality and spiritual experiences since they represent a central aspect of human existence”, which was the view of Sir Alister Hardy FRS, which led to his founding of the Religious Experience Research Centres that bear his name. (*The conclusions of the International Summit were published in the Scientific & Medical Network Journal, Network Review, Summer 201*4)

In addressing the subject, Prof. Jeff Astley, speaking first, in his talk *Beyond Science and Nature? Beyond Belief?*, explored what has been called ‘The New Frontier of Religion and Science’ – the territory marked out by developments in neuroscience, and by the metaphysical and theological claims about non-material transcendence. He related this debate to arguments about the nature of spiritual and religious experience, and other challenges posed by reductionist interpretations o f science *(for a full report, click here)*.

Bernard Carr, in an illustrated talk which followed, *Can Science Accommodate Mind and Spirituality?* argued that, indeed, it should. Modern physics claims to be close to a “Theory of Everything” and this would underlie all science in a reductionist perspective. But this neglects consciousness, mental and spiritual phenomena usually assumed to be beyond science. However, indications from ph ysics itself suggest that consciousness is a fundamental rather than incidental feature of the world, and that some sort of post-materialist scientific paradigm is required to accommodate this *(for a PDF of Prof. Carr’s presentation, click here)*.

The talks were followed by a dialogue between the two speakers in which they questioned each other on points of relevance ending up agreeing that a post-materialist scientific paradigm and a change of perspective is required.

The afternoon was open to questions and contributions from the floor, put to a Panel comprising the two speakers, Dr. Peter Fenwick and Andrew Burns, chairs by Dr. Fenwick, and an interesting discussion ensued.

John Franklin Hon Secretary AHSSSE.