

# PSYPIONEER JOURNAL

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# Arthur Conan Doyle

## And the Independent Direct Voice

*July 7th marked the eighty-fourth anniversary of the death of one of the movement's great propagandists, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, born in Edinburgh on May 22nd 1859 – died July 7th 1930.*

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### CONAN DOYLE STILL LIVES

#### He Makes a Gramophone Record<sup>1</sup>

AT the Spiritualist camp, Chesterfield, Indiana, U.S.A.,<sup>2</sup> a seance for the direct voice was held with the medium James Laughton, of Detroit,<sup>3</sup> at which the actual voice of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was clearly heard. Mrs. Etta Bledsoe, one of the most noted mediums in the United States, who passed away recently, also spoke.<sup>4</sup> The voices were so clear, distinct and natural that it was decided to make an effort to record them.

<sup>1</sup>. Taken from the *Two Worlds* Friday November 29th 1940, front page.

<sup>2</sup>. Camp Chesterfield – the official site for the Indiana Association of Spiritualists (IAOS), Chesterfield IN founded in 1886:—  
[http://www.campchesterfield.net/Camp\\_Chesterfield\\_A\\_Spiritual\\_Center\\_of\\_Light/Hett\\_Art\\_Gallery\\_and\\_Museum\\_part\\_2.html](http://www.campchesterfield.net/Camp_Chesterfield_A_Spiritual_Center_of_Light/Hett_Art_Gallery_and_Museum_part_2.html)

<sup>3</sup>.—Reference to James Laughton: *A week at Camp Chesterfield, Indiana: Materializations with Lula Taber – 1941*:—<http://esotericbooks.deds.nl/index.php/content/campchesterfield> The most general reference on the internet is: “In 1958, the English-born Spiritualist C. Dorreen Phillips wrote of her experiences with a medium at Camp Chesterfield, Indiana: “In Rev. James Laughton’s séances there are many Indians. They are very noisy and appear to have great power. [...] The little guides, or doorkeepers, are usually Indian boys and girls [who act] as messengers who help to locate the spirit friends who wish to speak with you.”

<sup>4</sup>.—Etta S. Bledsoe delivered her first public lecture when she was 16; after the death of her first husband she married A. Scott Bledsoe. They toured the U.S.A. together for 26 years, lecturing and demonstrating until his death in 1922. Etta continued her work with her sister Mrs Evalyne Burnside, a trumpet medium. Etta Bledsoe died on July 5th 1940.

Mrs Bledsoe and Sir Arthur were consulted upon the matter and their co-operation asked for. They were both enthusiastic and promised their wholehearted support and assistance in any plan to spread the truths of Spiritualism throughout the world. It is interesting to recall that during his earth life Sir Arthur had a very high opinion of the gramophone as a means of propagating the cause which he loved and he made a record, one of "His Master's Voice" series in which he told the story of how he wrote Sherlock Holmes and then proceeded to tell of his connection with Spiritualism and his certainty of the possibility of communion with the so-called dead. I believe the record had a good sale.

Mr. Ralph Pressing, Editor of the "Psychic Observer," spent a good deal of time and effort in trying to find a recording concern broad minded enough to entertain the "crazy idea of recording the voices of the dead."<sup>5</sup> He met with a good deal of ridicule, and much sympathy for his supposed weak mindedness, but finally a company was found to undertake the job. Accordingly a seance was held in Buffalo, N.Y., in the rooms of the Trans-studio Recording Corporation, on September 25th last. The mediums were James Laughton and Mable Riffle, with six other sitters, in addition to the recording staff. The seance was highly successful. First Mrs. Bledsoe made a double-sided ten inch record. She was followed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and we understand that the pronunciation, accent, inflections of voice and phraseology are all evidentially characteristic of the famous author. He spoke of being associated with Sir William Crookes in Spirit Life and his whole talk was characteristic of the living Doyle.

Mr. James Laughton is quite a young man who is earning quite a reputation as a direct voice medium. He is the Pastor of the Church of Spiritual Harmony, Detroit, Michigan. It was thought wise, however, to have a second medium and Mrs. Mabel Riffle, the Secretary of the Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp, Indiana, was persuaded to co-operate, and the seance was sponsored by the Chesterfield Camp.<sup>6</sup> The evening before the actual recording a trial seance was held at the office of the "Psychic Observer," in fact nothing was left undone that could have been done to ensure success.

Fortunately both Etta Bledsoe and Conan Doyle were familiar with the technique of the Microphone before they passed away, and undoubtedly this would have helped them. The records are now obtainable from the Psychic Observer, Lily Dale, New York, at five dollars each.

Fortunately there are gramophone records made by Sir Arthur during his life time with which this can be compared. The Psychic Observer suggests that

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<sup>5</sup>. Ralph and Juliette Pressing founded "The Psychic Observer" in 1937 at Jamestown, New York. The first issue appeared in August 1938. Later in 1957, the Pressings retired and Agnes F. Reuther became editor. A couple of years later Tom O'Neill acquired the periodical.

<sup>6</sup>. In 1960 the *Psychic Observer* headlined: "Fraud Uncovered at Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp – Infra-Red Motion Pictures Reveal this Great Deception"; this involved Mrs. Mabel Riffle. See *Psypioneer* Volume 4. No 5. May 2008:—*Fraud uncovered at Chesterfield Spiritualist Camp – Psychic Observer*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.5May2008.pdf>

this recording of the spirit voice speaking directly has never before been done. That is not so. I believe gramophone records were made in London over ten years ago at a direct voice seance, and at any rate, Mr. J. W. Miller recorded quite a number of spirit voices at seances held by Mrs. McCullam, at the International Congress in Glasgow three years ago. That, however, does not detract from the value of the work now accomplished.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was one of the finest propagandists Great Britain has had this century, and the production of this record is but another evidence that his work still goes on.

Doyle has frequently given evidence through different mediums in this country. His family have received plenty of evidence and, in fact, I have talked with him myself at a direct voice seance, and have had many indications of his continued interest. I am not at all surprised to hear that he has chosen America for this exhibition of his power. After his first lecture tour in the States I had a long conversation with him in which he compared the physical phenomena of Spiritualism in the States, with their parallels in this country. He then expressed the opinion that psychic phenomena were far more easily produced in the States than here, because the atmosphere was more electrical and contained less humidity. He was of the opinion that these conditions accounted for the greater number of mediums for this class of phenomena in the States. My friend, Horace Leaf,<sup>7</sup> who has frequently toured America, holds the same opinion.

It is good to know that Sir Arthur's convictions are still maintained in his new sphere of life. He had a high appreciation of mediumship provided it rested upon an evidential basis, he had little time for platitudes. The creator of Sherlock Holmes realised that theories were useless unless they were supported by evidence and I can quite imagine the enthusiasm with which he co-operated in this little scheme for upsetting the critics and placing permanently on record the fact of his continued existence and that his fertile mind was still engaged in propagating the cause he so ardently loved and for which he made so many sacrifices.

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Conan Doyle's alleged spirit voice would later become better known in the Leslie Flint séances.<sup>8</sup> In January 1946, a few days after his thirty-fifth birthday, Flint returned to civilian life from World War II. After a few days of getting used to civilian life, he tells us in his autobiography *Voices in the Dark*, 1971; "the doors of the Temple of Light were opened again and I resumed the work I was born to do." It appears Flint moved into Sydney Grove, a quiet cul-de-sac in Hendon around the mid 1930's becoming a centre for psychic and spiritual activity. Flint and the members of his regular circle decided to form an association with the object of providing evidence of the continuity of life after

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<sup>7</sup>.—*The Two Worlds* editor: Ernest Walter Oaten (1875-1952) 1919-1945.

<sup>8</sup>.—Psypioneer has pointed out errors in Wikipedia previously. We can note in this instance it states: "The first public séance performed by Flint was in 1955, just after he formed an association called the Temple of Light." Both claims appear to be incorrect:—[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie\\_Flint](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Flint)

physical death by the demonstration of psychic gifts. A constitution was drawn up and a committee was elected to conduct affairs, and they named it the Temple of Light. Pages 141-2 of Flint's autobiography show that Doyle did not just address the circle as a whole, but involved himself in the communications:

“At one group seance where Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding, a convinced Spiritualist, was an honoured guest, my Cockney guide, Mickey, introduced a young airman in these words: ‘There’s a chap here from the Air Force who wants to get in touch with his parents. He’s so excited I don’t know if he will manage to speak but I’ll try to help him.’ Shortly we heard the voice of the airman asking us to contact his father and mother. He had been to see them often, he said, but they could not see him. He told us he was killed when his plane crashed over Norway when he was twenty years old and he was his parents’ only son. ‘Please tell Mother I’m all right now,’ he urged, ‘she is so unhappy it is making her ill.’

No one in the group could identify this communicator so Mr Walter J. West, our Vice-President at the Temple of Light, asked for the boy’s full name and address and promised to get in touch with the parents if it were possible to do so. ‘Thank you so much,’ replied the dead boy, ‘I had three Christian names, Peter William Handford and my surname was Kite.’ He then gave an address in Grange Park, north London, where he said his parents were still living. But that was not all, Peter Kite next spoke to a man in the group saying, ‘I know you, you are Mr Turner, you took out my tooth.’ None of the other sitters knew Mr Turner was a dentist nor did they know his name. Mr Turner said he remembered Peter Kite coming to him for treatment some years before but he did not know he had been killed nor even that he had joined the R.A.F.

After the seance Mr West went to Grange Park and found the house where Peter Kite had said his parents lived. The dead boy’s mother, Mrs May Kite, answered the door to Mr West’s ring and when she heard what he had to tell her she readily accepted an invitation to attend a special group seance at the Temple of Light with Peter’s father.

Because we felt Lord Dowding’s presence at the first seance had helped Flight Lieutenant Peter Kite to manifest we invited him to be a member of the special group at which the boy’s parents would be guests and he readily agreed to sit with us.

Almost as soon as the light was turned off Mickey came to tell us Conan Doyle wanted to say a few words to Mr and Mrs Kite before their son came to speak to them. Doyle, who in his lifetime finally became convinced of Spiritualism after years of sitting with mediums, then spoke very sympathetically to the parents who had no knowledge of psychic matters. He explained to them how after Peter’s plane crashed he had found himself alive in a new more subtle body which resembled in every respect his physical body which he could see lying motionless in the wreckage of his aircraft. At first, Doyle told the couple, their son had been bewildered because although he could see the body which he recognised as himself he felt so gloriously alive and well he simply did not realise he was dead. When two peasants came to investigate the wrecked plane Peter was puzzled when they seemed neither to see nor hear him, but soon some friends of

his whom he knew to be dead came to explain his new condition of life to him and to take him to his new plane of being.

As soon as Conan Doyle had finished speaking Peter Kite excitedly greeted his father and mother. ...”

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Recordings of Flint’s séances have existed for six decades or more, Doyle’s alleged voice through one of Flint’s independent direct voice séances can be found on YouTube: “Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Spirit Communication by Leslie Flint.” It states only that it is over forty-five years ago (in 2012).<sup>9</sup>

Leslie Flint was a friend of Mr Noah Zerdin, one of the founders of “The Link Association of Home Circles” in 1931.<sup>10</sup> The object of the organisation was to bring together as many members of Spiritualist home circles throughout the world as possible to exchange experiences they had in their circles and to provide a common meeting ground for people of like interests. Flint became involved with “The Link” on Saturday May 16th 1935, at Bloomsbury’s Victoria Hall when a large direct voice séance was held with Flint as the medium.<sup>11</sup>

Mrs. A. E. Perriman, who died in September 1936, was the first voice medium for “The Link” who on April 28th 1934 held a large direct voice séance – Hannan Swaffer reported in *Psychic News* for May 5th 1934:

“THE largest direct voice seance which, probably, has ever been held took place at the Æolian Hall last Saturday, when “The Link,” which consists of 187 home circles, celebrated its third anniversary by arranging that the direct voice should be microphoned so that over 500 people could hear it, and with the same ease. Indeed, you could hear better, I am told, at the back of the hall than you could on the platform.

“Mrs. A. E. Perriman, the medium, was so ill with laryngitis that she could no more than whisper. It seems almost a miracle that she could have been used at all. In spite of that, some of the voices were so loud that they could have been heard at the back of the hall even without a microphone.

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<sup>9</sup>.—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Spirit Communication by Leslie Flint (Leslie Flint Educational Trust: <http://www.leslieflint.com/>):—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CFjIvmaLQU>

<sup>10</sup>.—The name Noah Zerdin 1889-1972 is well known in pioneering a general awareness and the safe practice of physical mediumship. This form of mediumship development is primarily restricted to private home circles, but surprisingly little information appears to be known about him, and about the formation of the Link Association of Home Circles, which he co-founded in 1931, and which developed into an international association of home circles, privately publishing its own monthly journal ‘The Link’. Around 1930, Noah Zerdin began to exchange reports of his home circle with those of Harold Chibbett. Later in Light, March 21st 1931 appeared this letter: “HOME CIRCLES – AN APPEAL: Sir,-A group of private circles, sitting for physical phenomena, would like to get into touch with other home circles for physical phenomena, for the purpose of exchanging reports and pooling experiences for mutual benefit. Will those interested please communicate. N ZERDIN.”

In 1931 and 1932 Harold Chibbett and Noah Zerdin held their first conferences of “The Link” when the number of circles represented was respectively 21 and 26. H.S.W. Chibbett became Hon. Secretary.

<sup>11</sup>.—Leslie Flint – Physical Medium:—<http://www.the-voicebox.com/flintleslie.htm>



“After the preliminary proceedings, during which Noah Zerdin, the founder of “The Link,” spoke of the extraordinary growth of the movement, and I welcomed the delegates, who came from all parts of the country, two circles were formed round the medium on the stage. She sat in front of the microphone.

“Then, after a few minutes, we sat listening to spirit voices for nearly two and a half hours. It was all recorded on gramophone records, nine eighteen inch records being filled on both sides.

“Now, nearly fifty Voices were heard. Most of them had the same quality of tone. It was explained by one of the spirit guides, who said that owing to the condition of the medium’s own vocal chords, a special ectoplasmic “pipe” had been made for use that night.”

Swaffer remarks on the various communications in the article for example Red Cloud spoke to Estelle Roberts, John Myers received a communication from fellow spirit photographer:

“If you take my advice, you will have nothing more to do with tests,” said Hope, in his old Lancashire accent. “I do not believe in them. You just carry on and try to do the best you can for everybody. Never mind what anybody says. This is Billie Hope of Heaven, not of Crewe.”

Swaffer continued:

“We heard from Conan Doyle and from Kingsley Doyle his son. We heard, too from Raymond Lodge. Sir Arthur's message was one of encouragement.

*“Never mind what attitude the world may show to you, “he said.” Just put everything else behind you and carry on. I want you to know that I have been interested in this movement, as well as many others. I hope that this is only one gathering of many of its kind.”*

**Do any of these old gramophone records still exist from Psychic Observer, and The Link?**

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## CONAN DOYLE WAS NOT FIRST CHOICE AS LSA PRESIDENT

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was the third choice as president of the London Spiritualist Alliance in 1925, as the Alliance prepared to move from Holborn to their new headquarters in South Kensington.

As noted in *Psypioneer* August 2011,<sup>12</sup> Henry Withall, became vice-president when Edmund Dawson Rogers succeeded to the presidency on the death of Stainton Moses in 1892. When Rogers died in 1910, Withall, though disclaiming the presidency, chaired the LSA council, and did so until a few months before his own death in 1924. For a few months in 1921, Lord Molesworth had served as president, but quickly stepped down, and Withall had resumed the chair.

After Withall's death, the LSA approached Oliver Lodge by a letter from Dawson Rogers, son of Edmund Dawson Rogers. This was the third time; Lodge had last been invited in 1916. Lodge again declined, partly through pressure of work, and partly because he feared such a presidency would be misinterpreted. He meant that the term "Spiritualist" in the LSA title might imply a link with Spiritualism as a religion and with the Movement in general. In fact it was always the policy of Lodge to keep some distance from organised Spiritualism.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Lodge was an excellent friend of the LSA; he privately advised them for example in efforts to get the law on mediumship changed in 1929, and publicly appeared on behalf of the Alliance in the 1928 Cantlon trial, when the LSA secretary had been arrested and charged, along with the medium Mrs Cantlon.

Having been turned down by Lodge, the LSA asked Lord Molesworth if he would serve again, but he would not. Conan Doyle had already been approached unsuccessfully some time before, (he considered his propaganda work more important) but this time Lady Molesworth helped persuade him, on condition that he would not be troubled by day to day detail.

ACD became LSA president just as they moved into their new premises, Membership stood about 1,000 in 1925, but by the early 1930s was to pass 3,000. Readers may like to consider why this great leap forward happened.

LP.

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<sup>12</sup>—*Pioneer*: Volume 7. No 8. August 2011:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP7.8August2011.pdf>

<sup>13</sup>—In a 1918 interview with *The Strand Magazine*, [Lodge] when asked "...how Spiritualism stands today?" tactfully and honestly replied "I can't answer for Spiritualism. I don't much like the word myself, except as a term in Philosophy. In so far as Spiritualists constitute a sect, and hold religious services, I don't belong to it and have no sort of connection with it; though doubtless it attracts many good people."

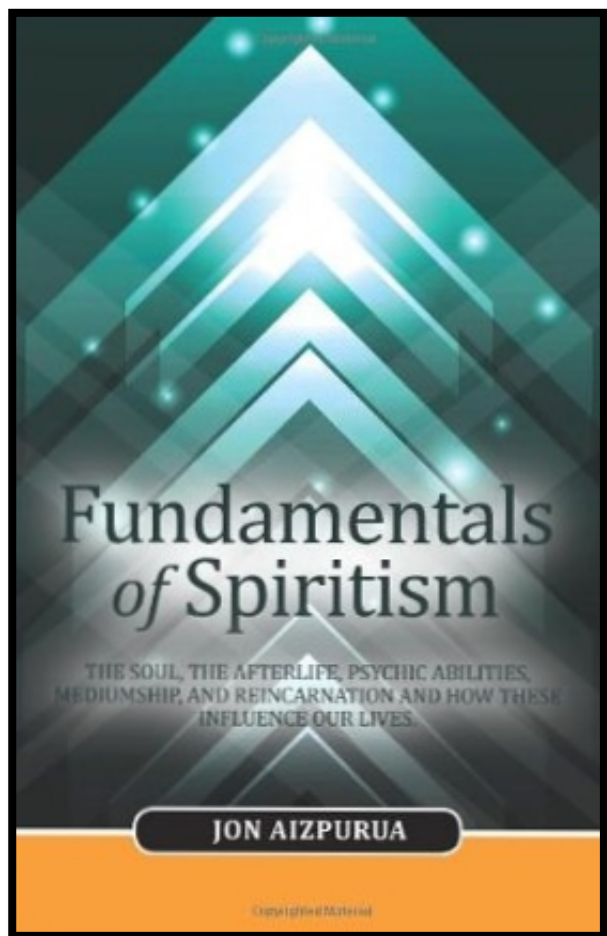


# A NEW STATEMENT OF SPIRITISM

Jon Aizpurua “*Fundamentals of Spiritism*”

Charleston, North Carolina.

2013, 330 pages.<sup>14</sup>



In numerical terms, the religio-psychic movement following the teachings of Allen Kardec, usually called Spiritism, is by far the most numerous worldwide, especially in South America. There has not been much literature in English, as distinct from the romance languages. This situation is remedied by the English translation of *Los Fundamentos del Spiritismo*, (2000) by Jon Aizpurua, a professor of psychology in Venezuela.

Reincarnation is one of the Spiritist fundamentals, and as well as modern research by Stevenson and Guirdham, Aizpurua notes the work of Kardecist pioneers such as in France Gabriel

Delanne, who published a study of 50 cases in 1924; in Spain, Jose Maria Fernandez Colavida, a regressionist, and Albert De Rochas in Paris who also used hypnosis.

For information on Spiritualist origins, Aizpurua relies chiefly on standard Spiritualist sources, such as Conan Doyle *History of Spiritualism* which is available in Spanish, and Emma Hardinge *Modern American Spiritualism*. Psypioneer readers will know that not all their detail has stood the test of time. We look forward to Kardecist accounts that take account of Psypioneer's updating work.<sup>15</sup>

A curious detail is the name of the peddler at Hydesville, given here as Charles Bryan Rosna (p.59). This full middle name, as distinct from an initial, is new to me, and it would be good to know its origin.

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<sup>14</sup>—*Fundamentals of Spiritism: The soul, the afterlife, psychic abilities, mediumship, and reincarnation and how these influence our lives*: Available at Amazon with the “Look inside” feature:—  
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Fundamentals-Spiritism-afterlife-mediumship-reincarnation/dp/1484101634>

<sup>15</sup>—A parallel example would be Marina Sisson's 2003 Brazilian book on Madame Blavatsky. Written in Portuguese, it drew confidently from the latest work in the journal “Theosophical History”  
<http://bookzz.org/book/1388846/5bf94a>

The book lacks an index, nor is there a cumulate bibliography at the end, and this is unfortunate. We may hope this will be remedied in later editions. We have here only scratched the surface of its wide scope. Undoubtedly the most controversial revelation in the book is in bold type in the section on “mediumship education.”

“The Spiritist doctrine does not allow, under any circumstances, the receiving of any remuneration whatever for the practice of mediumship.” (p171.)

Could this rule have led to the very rapid spread of the Kardecist teaching?

LP.

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# HORACE LEAF

*Medium, lecturer, teacher, traveler, author*

Horace Leaf's F.R.G.S. (1886c-1971) contribution to Spiritualism spanned decades. He started to contribute to the British Spiritualist press in 1907, giving his first lecture the following year. Later he also wrote for the American press including *The Progressive Thinker* which was edited and published by Mrs. M. E. Cadwallader, Chicago, Illinois.<sup>16</sup> In *The Two Worlds*, Leaf serialised circa 1912 'Historical Records,' the histories of societies and churches, and in the July 2014 issue of the 'SNU Pioneer' his account of the early introduction of Spiritualism and of the formation of the first society at Keighley is republished.

Leaf contributed another series in *The Two Worlds*, "Notable National and International Personalities in Our Cause: Interviews with Prominent workers for our Movement at Home and Abroad". Number 4 in the series was Ronald Brailey.<sup>17</sup> We can note below Brailey had played a significant part in Leaf's introduction into Spiritualism. A recent book *And the Band Played On*, by Christopher Ward 2011 records the aftermath of the sinking of the Titanic and shows a photograph of Brailey's son as one on the musicians (pianist) who perished on the ship.

Leaf authored a number of books including *What is this Spiritualism*, 1918 (1919 U.S.A.), *Under the Southern Cross*, 1923, and *The Psychology and Development of Mediumship*, (the publication date of this book is uncertain but it is c1926,) He lectured widely at home and abroad as a normal speaker as well as inspirational speaking, he demonstrated clairvoyance, psychometry and also practiced healing and physical mediumship.

He was closely associated with the Marylebone Spiritualist Association, his name first appearing in an Association programme in October 1915; in 1960 the M.S.A. changed its name to the 'Spiritualist Association of Great Britain'.<sup>18</sup> Soon after James Hewat McKenzie inaugurated the British College of Psychic Science at 59, Holland Park, in April, 1920,<sup>19</sup> Leaf became staff lecturer on psychology and development of mediumship. Out of this work developed his book, *The Psychology and Development of Mediumship*, with McKenzie writing the foreword. In the early 1950's Leaf was awarded honorary membership, and

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<sup>16</sup>.-*The Progressive Thinker*, a weekly journal, was founded by J. R. Francis in 1889. Mrs. Mercy Cadwallader took charge in 1910 and continued until her death on December 24th 1935.

<sup>17</sup>.-THE LATE MR. RONALD BRAILEY:—"Mr. Brailey started his investigations into Spiritualism in 1892, when living in Luton. Two years later, he and a few enthusiastic friends, founded the East London Spiritual Association. He became known as a professional Medium and psychometrist of remarkable power, and he was also in demand as a lecturer, but during the last few years his engagements as a public speaker became rarer, owing to his failing health. He passed away on Saturday morning, the 21st ulto, after a short illness. The funeral service was conducted by Mr. A. Vout Peters." — Taken from *Light*, March 7th 1931 page 117.

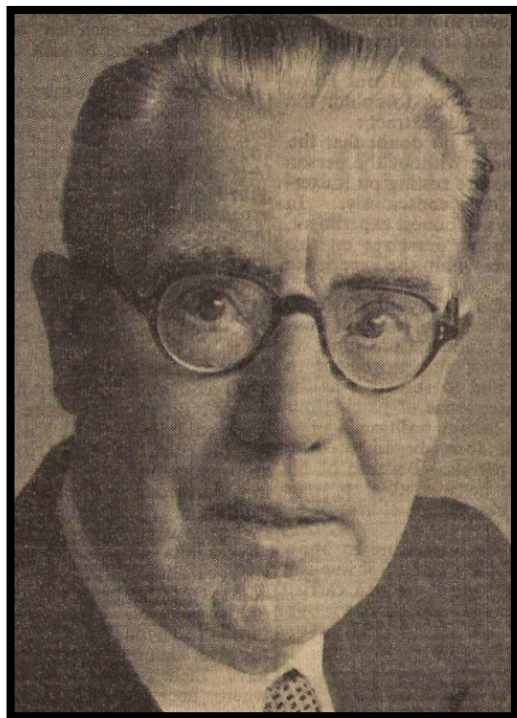
<sup>18</sup>.-The Spiritualist Association of Great Britain:—<http://www.sagb.org.uk/>  
See *Psypioneer*: Volume 2. No 12. December 2006:—*The story of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association 1872-1928*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP2.12December06.pdf>

<sup>19</sup>.-See *Psypioneer*: Volume 3. No 8. August 2007: —*A Knight Errant of Psychic Science James Hewat McKenzie*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.8August07.pdf>

diploma of the Spiritualists' National Union; displayed in the Britten Memorial Museum housed at the Arthur Findlay College is a large bust of Horace Leaf and his typewriter.<sup>20</sup>

Below is the first of two interviews with Leaf, by *Two Worlds* correspondent Philip Paul, published on October 1st 1955:

## HORACE LEAF



HE paused and grasped the ornate arm of a chair that used to be occupied by the creator of Sherlock Holmes, the man under whose sponsorship in 1922-23 he journeyed for thousands of miles as a Spiritualist crusader in the Antipodes.

“You know,” he said, “I am half-convinced that life is a form of punishment for misdeeds we have committed elsewhere. We are born with a cry and die with a moan. It is just like going to Pentonville; some have long sentences and others shorter ones.”

There was nothing dejected about his acceptance of this somber yet startlingly sensible philosophical subtlety. His smile permitted the observation that, if the theory were correct, age must become a measure of the gravity of one's sins.

“Of course,” he replied “Is it not said that those whom the gods love die young?”

### Effect of religion

Realising the presence of an unasked question as to the effect of this stalwart conception upon accepted systems of faith and worship, he elaborated.

“I do not think the world grows better for our being in it, but I think it grows more interesting. A man who becomes religious does not become a better man for it, his new convictions turn his interests in other directions. So you have the harsh father and stern husband who nevertheless declare their acceptance of benevolent philosophies.”

This was the Leaf taking a page from his own book: the brilliant thinker and refulgent orator who has given so much, and still has so much to give, to Spiritualism.

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<sup>20</sup>.—The Arthur Findlay College:—<http://www.arthurfindlaycollege.org/>

We had strolled into the second-floor chapel of the Marylebone Spiritualist Association's new Belgrave Square headquarters. He was only just free from his afternoon obligations as chairman of an investigators' problem hour that had lasted for two, but his questioners had clearly stimulated rather than depleted him.

### **Intended for ministry**

A Londoner by birth, Horace Leaf was one of 11 children. His father was an artist and a consultant on design. His mother was a fatal dreamer. A brother, Claude, was an outstanding physical medium at 15. A Christian minister in America, he died last year.

Horace's early years were spent studying for the ministry following his conversion at 14. He knew nothing of Spiritualism until he was 18 when he set out to "put a stop to it." His first step in this direction was to attend a meeting at his local Spiritualist church in Hackney.

"There was a psychometry medium named Ronald Brailey there. I took another student with me because I had a scheme which I thought would confound the sensitive. When the trays were sent round among the audience, I gave my friend a pocket knife to put in and I put in a key.

"My idea in doing this was that the medium might thereby contradict himself. But when he picked up the key he said that the person who had put it in had come to laugh and scoff but would stay to watch and pray."

How right that obscure medium was! Since that day the scoffer-turned-Spiritualist has visited platforms and séance rooms in 31 countries, propagating truths that turned him from Orthodoxy.

In the beginning, he sat for development with a blind medium, but, after a short time, she told him: "It is a pity to take your money. You have no mediumistic faculties."

Then the determined investigator began on his own. Almost at once there were results, starting with physiological reactions and ending with clairvoyance and physical mediumship. Happily, through his father's financial generosity, he was relieved of the need to earn a living.

The materialization séances lasted only three years before he developed heart trouble which necessitated their cessation. By that time he was having cataleptic, out-of-the-body experiences which often brought on a state of suspended animation. He was constantly anxious lest someone should summon a doctor to him in the midst of one of these experiments, for he would certainly have been certified as dead.

### **Adviser to Doyle**

He began in the Spiritualist movement as a trance speaker and met Sir Arthur Conan Doyle during the first war. Because of his heart condition he was not called for active service but was given an important administrative post with the Admiralty.

He also acted as adviser to Conan Doyle, whom he recalls as “keen and shrewd. People used to mistake his kindness for foolishness. He would always find out if there was anything wrong, but he would never refer to it. It was he who warned me that Harry Price was not trustworthy.”

Conan Doyle was shrewd enough to recognize in Leaf a perfect Spiritualist missionary to tour Australia and New Zealand. The collections taken at Leaf’s packed meetings in those countries contributed between £1,000 and £1,500 to the expenses of the tour. With his expert knowledge of the subject and his intimate grasp of human reactions – he studied psycho-pathology at London University – Leaf could hardly have failed.

Returning to England, he took up the task of lecturing at Edinburgh College of Psychic Science and the development of mediumship.<sup>21</sup> He also published his famous book “Under the Southern Cross,” parts of which are still used as a standard work for schools. The same volume brought him nomination to fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society.

Further travels ensued, during which he met and studied some of the world’s finest mediums. Those who stand out in his mind are F. O. Matthews—“He was superb and would sit under any conditions”; Frank Decker—“I saw him ‘killed’ at an experimental séance, pronounced dead by doctors who were present, and then resuscitated”, “Margery”—“Her séances were given in full light and she made no conditions.”

### **Messages on slates**

He made special mention of Laura Pruden—“About 80 years old, she gave me a slate-writing séance in full sunlight in her flat one afternoon. When she held the slates out at arm’s length, I heard the chalk writing underneath. When she turned the slates up, there was an evidential message from my mother which reproduced all her familiar errors of grammar and spelling as well as the hand-writing I knew so well. Laura Pruden had never met my mother.”

Since those days, he has filled many books, lectures and demonstrations of his psychic gifts with many millions of words designed to satisfy the inquirer of the truth of a four-word sentence: Survival is a fact. No man could have done a job better. Three years ago, he was awarded honorary membership and diploma of the Spiritualists’ National Union. “But,” he says, “I am always a freelance.”

### **His last ambition**

His life has held its quota of pain as well as a great measure of achievement. His wife passed over in 1934. His only son suffered a severe brain injury during service in the late war. Deafness besets him as a result of bomb-blast in a London air raid.

Tall, powerfully built and healthy complexioned, he is a scarred but unbeaten warrior of whom all advocates of truth must be proud. Yet there was pathos in his

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<sup>21</sup>—Leslie Price noted: I wonder if the word Edinburgh is a mistake there, as this was not opened until 1932. Perhaps just BCPS (British College of Psychic Science) is meant?



reply to an inquiry whether he possessed any unfulfilled ambition. “Yes,” he said, with a firm farewell grip of his large but gently hand, “to be buried quietly and not to suffer too long.”

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### **Leslie Price notes:**

This may or may not be the incident in which Leaf was injured, referred to in the interview. In the letter preserved in the LSA (London Spiritualist Alliance) Publications minute book, Leaf says nothing of any injury.

## **Medium’s house blitzed**

In October 1940, the proprietors of the weekly newspaper LIGHT were concerned to hear from Horace Leaf that his house in Harrow had suffered a direct hit by a high explosive bomb, rendering it uninhabitable. Since much of Leaf’s teaching work was carried out from his home by correspondence, this made him unable to meet his financial obligations, and at his request LIGHT waived an advertising bill.

### **Leaf interviewed forty years earlier:**

## **Mr. Horace Leaf (London).<sup>22</sup>**



MR. LEAF is quite a satisfactory subject to interview. He at once grasps the import of a question, and replies succinctly and ably. He wastes neither the time of the interrogator nor his own. Courteous in manner and sincere in opinion. Mr. Leaf imparts a feeling of conviction and earnestness which leaves a sense of transparent frankness as a leading characteristic of his nature.

Quietly seated in his consulting room a little time was spent in amiable converse upon things in general, when the business of the occasion was opened by the inquiry as to his opinions relative to religious matters previous to his acceptance of Spiritualism, which elicited the following response:

“Previous to being a Spiritualist I was an earnest Christian and actually began training with a view to being a foreign missionary. Losing faith in Christian

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<sup>22</sup>.—*The Two Worlds*, November 26th 1915: Front page, continuing on 590-591

theology, I inclined strongly to Agnosticism, and finally found mental and spiritual satisfaction in Spiritualism.

“Before entering seriously into public as a medium, speaker, and writer, I was deeply interested in politics. Twice, at the invitation of public bodies, I contested as a candidate for election on a London Borough Council, and was invited to do so a third time, but preferred devoting myself to the propagation of Spiritualism.

“I developed in twelve months a degree of mediumship, etc., that won me invitations from various Societies to occupy their platforms. I have now been actively engaged in the Movement about eight years. My work has greatly extended, and I have lectured, and demonstrated in various parts of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales in the Cause.

“I have written extensively for several years for papers both at home and abroad. I love my work, and realise that in Spiritualism there is not only confidence in survival of the change called death, and the possibility of communion with the spirit world, but a great inspiration to the study of all truth. Through it I have received great spiritual satisfaction, and believe that when it is more widely known a great deal will be accomplished for the general good of humanity.”

“How did you first become interested in Spiritualism?” I asked.

“Through a relation of mine attending a meeting in London, near where we were living. She gave such a remarkable description of the clairvoyance that had been demonstrated that I determined to witness it myself if possible. At that time I was falling away from orthodoxy and becoming an Agnostic, and in consequence was in a very troubled state of mind. Spiritualism I regarded as all bunkum.”

What led you to alter your opinion?

“At one of the meetings I attended a medium was giving psychometrical readings. Trays passed round in which members of the audience, numbering between two and three hundred, were invited to place articles for the psychometrist to deal with. I determined to test the medium and accordingly gave an article to a friend who was with me to put in a tray, while I put one in myself. I fully expected, if the medium should happen to pick them up he would give contradictory delineations. In the course of the proceedings he took up one of my articles and gave me a most wonderful reading. Had he known me all my life, and my inmost feeling, he could not have done better. But I shall never forget his last remark: ‘The gentleman who put this article in would put in two to test me.’

“Later he read my other article in a way as remarkable as the former. And, mark you, he did not ask whom the article belonged to until he had finished his remarks.”

“Regarding your own psychic powers, Mr. Leaf, were you always a medium?”

“Up till the time I became acquainted with Spiritualism I do not remember having had the slightest psychic experience; indeed, I was quite ignorant of the possibility of spirit communion.”

“How, then, did you get your powers?”

“By sheer development. I was fortunate from the beginning. After attending several meetings and seances, and being told more than once I was psychic. I determined to see if it were true. Therefore, on Sunday evening I entered my bedroom, and said aloud that if there were any spirits who could communicate with me, I should be pleased to meet them in that room the following Wednesday at a certain time. Needless to say, I felt rather stupid, but there was a method in my madness. I intended sitting the two previous nights at the same time and in the same way that I should on the Wednesday. If anything strange should happen before the allotted time I concluded it would be due to suggestion, which might, I thought, account for it all. At that time, you must understand I knew nothing of physical phenomena. It was the best test I could devise under the circumstances. I had determined to trust nobody.”

“What was the result?”

“Nothing unusual happened on the Monday and Tuesday, but on Wednesday—the night I had arranged to meet the spirits—I had my first personal psychic experience. Within a month I had absolute evidence of the existence of intelligences out of the body.”

“Whom did you think they were?”

“I was unprepared then, and for a long time afterwards, to say. In time I came to recognise them to be disembodied human beings. Like most inquirers, I started with the assumption that they might be evil. That idea however, was soon dissipated. I have sat in hundreds of seances with people, as well as alone, and I have never seen anyone the worse for their interest, nor have I been myself. On the other hand, I have seen great good spring from it.”

“What are your particular psychic gifts?”

“Clairvoyance, psychometry, and inspirational speaking. I am also a normal speaker. Like most mediums, I have other gifts that occasionally manifest, such as raps and materialisation. I have also healing power, and have had some striking examples of its curative virtue. However, physical phenomena I seldom try to obtain.”

“Is there and special reason for that?”

“I think it best—especially in the earlier days of psychic development—to concentrate upon the unfoldment of one’s best gift or gifts. No medium can hope to develop every kind of psychic gift. Physically, as well as psychically, the strain would be too great. Few can hope to attain a high degree of both physical and mental psychic power, as one usually detracts from the other. Experience and observation have more than once proved this to me.”

“Is this always so throughout the psychic’s life?”

“Age makes a difference with this, as with many other things. Older mediums may venture where those young in development should fear to tread. It is for the instruction of the latter I speak.”

“You have probably witnessed much interesting psychic phenomena. Which do you consider the most convincing form?”

“Physical phenomena has always impressed me more than the mental. When produced under good conditions it requires more than an honest sceptic not to be influenced favourably by it. I have often sat in dark materialising and physical seances, and through them have received convincing tests. But far the best experience I ever had in this way was materialisation in broad daylight, with the sun shining brightly into the room. I was permitted to hold the arm, feel the clothing, and converse with one of the forms. He gave me some information that I did not believe to be true, and had the temerity to tell him so. But a few days afterwards a letter from a relation of mine in America confirmed the spirit’s statement.

“The ‘direct voice’ is undoubtedly one of the best forms of psychic phenomena we have been blessed with. I have experienced it several times, both privately and in circle with Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Wriedt, and cannot speak too highly of the satisfaction I have thus received. Nothing shows so well how thin the veil is which separates the spirit world from this. It would be of untold value to Spiritualism if this gift were developed extensively.”

“Do you mean an improvement in mediumship is needed for the proper growth of the Movement?”

“We can never be too good. In emphasising the importance of one form of mediumship, I do not mean to imply that others are unimportant. We have some wonderfully talented psychics to-day in every branch of mediumship. Probably the ‘voices’ will never be procurable at public meetings, any more than materialisations are. In that respect clairvoyance, psychometry, and impressions stand alone. They are the principal cause of the success of Spiritualism publicly. I should like to see these gifts supported much better by good public speaking. The speaking, I fear, is not all that could be desired.”

“To what do you attribute this?”

“To lack of proper arrangements. The present Unions are doing a very necessary work by binding Societies closer together and making the best use of the platform material at hand. But unfortunately nothing is being done to produce better material. Even the gaps that are being constantly made in the ranks are not being filled.”

“In what way do you think this can best be done?”

“There is only one way, I think: By adopting the same method all other successful religious bodies have had to adopt, namely, by instituting a training college, and there educating the proper people.”

“Would not that be very expensive?”

“It cannot be done without money, but I have no doubt Spiritualists could find that. We are not altogether poor, and many earnest Spiritualists would willingly help if they could be sure the matter was in representative hands. It would be some time before the full effect could be properly felt. But in one respect it would be immediately beneficial. The mere fact that the Movement had a common objective of so laudable a nature would encourage and bind the members together. In a few years the primary object would be attained, and Spiritualism rapidly assume its proper important position in the religious life of humanity.”

“Do you mean the work of Spiritualism is religious only?”

“In the broadest sense of the term, yes, for that includes all phases of human activity and aspiration. The failure to realise this would result in separating Spiritualism from the common life of the people, as it has the Christian churches. The belief in the immanence of God, so strongly established among Spiritualists, naturally includes humanity in all its aspects.”

“What is your opinion regarding the growth of Modern Spiritualism?”

“It is phenomenal, especially since it appeals so strongly and effectively to science. Probably no other religious movement has made such rapid headway. But in some respects we are more indebted to outsiders than to ourselves for this. Some important ecclesiastic or scientist testifies to the reality of psychic phenomena, and thus interests the public in the subject. They naturally turn to Spiritualism as the recognised exponent of these things, and I fear we fail to hold them in most instances because our platforms are often not capable. Even Spiritualists frequently hesitate to introduce their friends to our public meetings, because they fear the result will be unimpressive. The consequence is thousands of people who believe in spirit return object to the name Spiritualist.”

“Is not that because the name is not yet popular?”

“Precisely. But it ought to be popular, and I suggest it is within our power to make it popular. Given sufficient capable and cultured public exponents of the phenomena and philosophy, nothing can stop it becoming popular. I am convinced this cannot be accomplished except we properly train our workers and offer them a proper inducement.”

“You travel extensively in connection with the Movement to various parts of the British Isles. It would be interesting to know the strongest impression that has been made upon you concerning the public attitude towards Spiritualism.”

“I have been deeply impressed with the improved mental attitude that is to be observed. From most unlikely people and in the least expected places one hears Spiritualism spoken favourably about. I once met an eminent Ethicist in a train in the Midlands, and I think he put the case very well when he said: ‘No well-informed person will venture to deny the existence of psychic phenomena and the importance of the Spiritualist Movement.’ The general public is always greatly influenced by the intellectuals, and so from that direction among others they incline more and more to us. The future is full of promise. I only hope that as an organised body Spiritualists will do their utmost to turn it to the best account.

“I have had several invitations to go abroad, notably from the United States of America, where I was expected last year, but my home engagements were too pressing. However, I am expecting to become acquainted with the Spiritualism in America before long.”

Fearing to make the story of the interview too long for the space placed at its service by the Editor, the scribe apologised to his victim, and suggested that his patience had been sufficiently taxed for the occasion.

Mr. Leaf is evidently a worker of whom much good will come from his labours by pen and voice. He has a keen sense of the duties of the position his ministrations have won for him, and the wide area of his service to the Cause—which practically embraces Great Britain—is an evidence of the success, under the guidance of the spirit world, which has attended his labours. A pleasant couple of hours, some kindly hospitality, and a warm hand-shake, after which the comfort of a cosy fire was exchanged for one of those raw November mornings which Londoners know so well, and the visit was ended.—  
HISTORICUS.

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# MRS DUNCAN: COLLEGE WARNED ALLIANCE

The British College of Psychic Science warned the London Spiritualist Alliance well before the start of their investigation of Mrs Duncan.<sup>23</sup> In a letter of 14<sup>th</sup> April 1930, the Hon. Chairman of the BCPS wrote:

Confidential

Dear Miss Phillimore

I am instructed by my Council who think it may be of help to you to know, that Major Mowbray, our Research Officer, paid a special visit to Mrs Duncan a physical medium in Dundee, of whom you have probably heard. He sat on two occasions but was not satisfied with the conditions under which she was sitting.

Yours sincerely, Rose Ch. De Crespigny.



**Helen Duncan**

At that time, Mowbray was already an experienced investigator, and had been to Newbiggin to study the ectoplasmic work of Tom Lynn, as reported in *Psypioneer*.<sup>24</sup>

One would like to think that LSA leaders had a private discussion with him in planning their tests of Mrs Duncan.

As reported in *Psypioneer* December 2013,<sup>25</sup> his written report has not been found.

L.P.

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<sup>23</sup>.—Victoria Helen McCrae Duncan (née MacFarlane) November 25th, 1897 – 6th, December 1956.

<sup>24</sup>.—See *Psypioneer*: Volume 10. No. 05. May 2014:—*An “Apport” Medium, Mr. T. Lynn (and photographs) – Psychic Science*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP10.5May2014.pdf>

<sup>25</sup>.—See *Psypioneer*: Volume 9. No. 12. December 2013:—*The Major Mowbray Mystery – Leslie Price*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP9.12December2013.pdf>

Note by LP. On September 20-21, scholars will gather from around the world for the latest International Conference on Theosophical History. But their destination, a handsome house between Oxford Street and Baker Street station, was not always the Theosophical headquarters.<sup>26</sup>

## THE THEOSOPHICAL HEADQUARTERS IN LONDON, 1883-1940

Compiled from the Archives of the English Section by a Group of Workers.

(The story begins with Mr. Sinnett's house where the London Lodge was nourished, and includes those used as Headquarters of the European Section and the British Section. When other European countries had formed themselves into National Societies the London Headquarters became the Headquarters of the English Section only.)

LITTLE of importance seems to have happened with regard to The Theosophical Society in England for a few years after it was formed in 1878. Meetings were only held occasionally. Things began to move, however, when Mr. Sinnett arrived in England in April 1883.

In June of that year the British Section of The Theosophical Society was called "The London Lodge of The Theosophical Society." The following passages were written by Mr. Sinnett:



"My wife and I arrived in London in April 1883, and events began to move rapidly in connection with the young Theosophical Society. . . .

"Miss Francesca Arundale now plays a conspicuous part in the work.<sup>27</sup> She and her mother were residing at 77 Elgin Crescent, Notting Hill, and while my wife and I were still unsettled that house became the scene of continual informal meetings of the most eager members of the young Society. Wherever we went, rapidly making new acquaintances in London, interested inquirers gathered round us. By this time The Society had a Council and its meetings are recorded in the minute book. . . .

"On 31st January 1884, we moved into our new house, 7 Ladbroke Gardens. For some time past our most interesting Theosophical gatherings had taken place in Miss Arundale's house in Elgin Crescent, where the most earnest members of

<sup>26</sup>.—Article taken from: *The Theosophist* Vol. LXII December 1940 pages 256-260.

<sup>27</sup>.—See *Psypioneer*: Volume 2. No 3. March 2006:—From Spiritualism to Theosophy- Francesca Arundale:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/2.3%20PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

The Society constituted a special group though without any elaborate formalities. We were at home, always, on Tuesday afternoons and my wife's diary is filled every week with long lists of our Tuesday visitors."<sup>28</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Sinnett developed a strong group, called the London Lodge, chiefly from among their own friends, but when Madame Blavatsky came to live in England in 1887 she formed another group which was chartered as the Blavatsky Lodge in that year. The Report of the Proceedings of the First Annual Convention contains the following words: "On the 20th October 1887, with the change of address of Madame Blavatsky, the Lodge (Blavatsky) was transferred to 17 Lansdowne Road, Holland Park."<sup>29</sup>

The article by Miss Esther Bright, published in the English number of THE THEOSOPHIST (October 1940), gives details of the life here, and at Avenue Road after Mrs. Besant joined The Society and after Madame Blavatsky's death.<sup>30</sup> This was the Headquarters of the European Section as well as of Great Britain, and remained so until 1899.



Annie Besant who succeeded Col. Olcott as President of The Theosophical Society

In September 1899 Mrs. Besant received an offer for the purchase of the lease of 19 Avenue Road. The would-be purchaser was anxious to complete the transfer at once, and to have possession at quarter-day. As Mrs. Besant was leaving for India, delay was impossible and a temporary habitation was secured on the second floor of 4 Langham Place, where The Society rented two good rooms.<sup>31</sup>

Later on, permanent accommodation was secured at 28 Albemarle Street. The accommodation available included a large room on the first floor, suitable for lectures, three excellent rooms for members' use as reading and conversational rooms, two rooms for the office and, the housekeeper's room. The annual rent of the new Headquarters, including rates and taxes, was £425, but a good proportion of this was returned in

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<sup>28</sup>.—*Early Days of Theosophy in Europe*, by A. P. Sinnett, p. 41.

<sup>29</sup>.—"History of Blavatsky Lodge," compiled by K. A. Beechey. THE THEOSOPHIST, Vol. LVIII.

<sup>30</sup>.—Annie Besant, use the Psypioneer search engine at:—[www.woodlandway.org](http://www.woodlandway.org)

<sup>31</sup>.—*The Vahan*, October 1899.

charges for the use of the lecture-room as Blavatsky Lodge hired this room for two evenings a week.

The following description was given in *The Vahan* of February 1900:

“*First Floor: Lecture Hall*—This room is capable of seating 110 persons comfortably. Twice a week the Hall is rented in the evening by the Blavatsky Lodge. It is hoped that it may often be let to members for special courses of lectures. It is also proposed to let it to other societies for meetings and lectures.

“*Drawing Room*—This room is intended to be used as a strangers’ room, to which members will be at liberty to invite visitors. On two afternoons a week this room can be engaged by members for special receptions.

“*Second Floor: Library*—This will be open to members on week-days from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. On Sundays from 3 p.m. to 10 p.m. In this room will be found the Reference Library.

“*Reading Room*, in which smoking will be permitted. In this room will be found the Lending Library.

“*General Secretary’s Private Office*.

“*Third Floor: General Office, and Housekeeper’s room and kitchen*.

“The endeavour has been to do only the ‘absolutely necessary’ in the way of painting, papering, and generally adapting the house to serve our needs, and to do this as economically as possible. The Committee look forward to a time when the financial position of the Section will warrant a further outlay in this direction. As it is, much is still lacking in the way of furniture and a variety of other things, which will add much to the comfort and beauty of our new home when they are obtained. To supply this deficiency the Committee are sanguine enough to hope they may rely on individual members. A list of what is most urgently needed will be kept in the Library, which members will be able to consult.”<sup>32</sup>—OTWAY CUFFE, *General Secretary*.

During the tenancy of the Albemarle Street Headquarters several problems seem to have arisen. The drainage system was faulty and a good deal had to be spent on its improvement. Legal difficulties followed the proposal that the Section should give up the house. In April 1909 the Headquarters moved to 106 New Bond Street, but this was not very satisfactory either, and *The Vahan* is full of correspondence on the subject.

A member who joined The Society when the Headquarters was still in Albemarle Street has given some amusing details of meetings. “There was a strange collection of people there.

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<sup>32</sup>.—*The Vahan*, Vol. IX.

All seemed to have strongly marked personalities, and dressed and behaved in very original ways. There were some rather fussy, very Victorian old ladies and some with short hair and mannish ways. The Society must have attracted a rare set of oddities in those days. You do not see such people about now! Of course they were a cordial and friendly group when one came to know them, however eccentric in appearance.”

In 1911 the purchase of a site in Tavistock Square was first suggested, and a committee was set up by Mrs. Besant to consider it. At this period she was encouraging all Sections to own their own headquarters buildings and the erection of the French Headquarters in Square Rapp, Paris, and of other Sectional buildings dates from this time. In November and December 1911, the work of The Society appears to have been carried on both at 106 New Bond Street and at 19 Tavistock Square, a large house standing on the site purchased for the new buildings.

The following is an extract from the General Secretary’s Annual Report for 1911: “The most important development in connection with the work has been the scheme for the new Headquarters, set in train with almost incredible swiftness by our President after the last Convention. Several meetings of the Executive Committee were held to consult with her; eventually, it was decided not to burden the National Society with the financial responsibility of the undertaking, and a small committee, consisting of the President, Miss Bright and Mrs. Sharpe, nobly volunteered to shoulder it, the National Society agreeing to rent accommodation in the new building at a figure to be agreed upon, and to take over the undertaking when it was financially a running concern. An eminently suitable site was secured off Tavistock Square, and on September 3, 1911, the foundation-stone at the north-east corner of the ground was laid with full Masonic honours. The sum needed for the new building was estimated at about £50,000, and within three weeks, by the magic known to the President she had collected in gift and promise over £25,000.

“The past year has also witnessed the removal of our Headquarters from New Bond Street to Tavistock Square, where we have converted to our temporary use two houses standing on the site of the future Headquarters. These afford us much more accommodation while at the same time our rent goes to the Trustees of the new Building Fund. The new temporary Headquarters were inaugurated with a house-warming and a ceremony of consecration performed by Mrs. Russak.”<sup>33</sup>

The work upon this new and very magnificent building was delayed again and again by all sorts of difficulties, including a strike of the building trades workers in London, and finally by the war of 1914. During all this time extensive activities were carried on at 19 and 19A Tavistock Square under a succession of energetic General Secretaries—Mr. Wedgwood, Mrs. Sharpe, Dr. Haden-Guest, for whom Mrs. Betts acted as deputy during his absence on war-service, Mr. G. S. Arundale and Mr. Baillie-Weaver. The Theosophical Publishing House used the house opposite, the Liberal Catholic Church had an oratory in Woburn Place close by, the newly organized New Education Fellowship took No. 11 Tavistock Square, and a vegetarian guest-house was established in the house beyond that.

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<sup>33</sup>.—*The Vahan*, Vol. XXI.

Sunday morning devotional meetings and public lectures on Sundays and other days were held in a temporary hutment known familiarly as “The Tin Hut” because of its corrugated iron roof. This hut was erected on the new site to accommodate rapidly growing audiences. Many older members will remember the very beautiful chamber music provided at this time by Mr. John Foulds and a group of gifted artists. Finally, during the war, the Government took over the completed new building as a Government Office and the Headquarters was moved to 23 Bedford Square. At the close of the war it was found that the alterations necessary to adapt the new building to Government purposes had rendered it unsuitable for the use of The Society. A forced sale resulted in great disappointment and some financial loss to those who had given money to the Building Fund.

In 1920 Mr. Baillie-Weaver wrote: “I have finally succeeded, with money kindly advanced by supporters, in completing the purchase of 23 Bedford Square on behalf of The Society as its new Headquarters. . . . The house is a fine one, and much better as regards space, compactness and railway and omnibus facilities for central London than our present premises are. It is, however, smaller, and it will require careful consideration so as to allocate the available space to the best advantage. It cost £4,500 and I assume, though I have not yet gone into the figures, that from £300 to £500 will be sufficient to do it up and pay for the additional furnishings which will be necessary.”<sup>34</sup>

The very beautiful building at 23 Bedford Square—used from 1920 to 1930 as the National Headquarters—had much the same accommodation as the house in Gloucester Place which is the present Headquarters, and was arranged in much the same way. The basement was for the use of the caretakers. The ground-floor had a members’ room where tea was served, and an enquiry room near the entrance. The library occupied the whole of the first floor, and the offices of the General Secretary, Treasurer, Registrar, and Publicity Department were on the second. For some time the E. S. had a room on the top-floor, as it had had at Tavistock Square, but later it had its own building at 78 Lancaster Gate.

Thanks to the very great generosity of Miss Mary Dodge, The Society also had the use of the Mortimer Halls, Mortimer Street, off Regent Street, for public lectures and meetings, and an adjoining bookshop for the Theosophical Publishing House. Conventions were usually held at Queen’s Hall when Mrs. Besant was in England, and her autumn and late summer series of lectures were given there. They were splendidly advertised and organized by Miss J. B. Chambres and the Hall was frequently packed from floor to ceiling. The Society at that period had about 5,000 members and Miss Dodge gave a generous donation each year for publicity purposes, so that there were four salaried National Lecturers and ample funds for advertising, publishing free literature, and the like. Mr. Baillie-Weaver, Major Graham-Pole and Mr. E. L. Gardner were General Secretaries during this period.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>.—*The Vahan*, Vols. XXIX-XXX.

<sup>35</sup>.—Mr. E. L. Gardner was well-known in connection with the “Cottingley fairies” see *Psypioneer*: Volume 3. No 1. January 2007:— *The Yorkshire Fairies (The Coming of the Fairies – Lantern Lecture By Mr. E. L. Gardner)*:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>



In 1929 the financial crisis affected these large donations. Many members had already resigned owing to Mr. Krishnamurti's attitude to The Society, and The Society passed through a difficult phase. An excellent offer was made for 23 Bedford Square, the lease of which was a short one, and the Headquarters moved to 45 Lancaster Gate, near to the already established Fellowship Club, a vegetarian guesthouse run by Fellows of The Society.

*News and Notes* reports: "The accommodation secured . . . is adequate and spacious, with a very large and beautifully appointed room on the first floor for the Library. The house is quietly situated though within a minute or two of Bayswater Road and several bus routes and of the tube station on the Central London Railway. It is also within a short distance of Paddington Station and the Metropolitan Railway. Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens are close by. A considerable saving in annual cost of upkeep will be effected by this change."<sup>36</sup> The opening At Home was held on July 4, 1930.

Mortimer Hall was sold about this time and Conventions were held at various Halls in London. Mrs. Margaret Jackson was General Secretary during this move.

The Lancaster Gate neighbourhood unfortunately proved to be too difficult to reach to attract large public audiences, although classes were held at 78 Lancaster Gate, the E. S. Headquarters, and many efforts were made to draw the public to the Sunday lectures held at 96 Lancaster Gate, the premises of the International New Thought Alliance.

In 1933 Dr. Besant died<sup>37</sup> and it was resolved to invite the members of The Theosophical Society in England and the public in general to subscribe towards the cost of the erection of a Lecture Hall in London, to be known as the Annie Besant Memorial Hall.<sup>38</sup>

Mrs. Josephine Ransom was then General Secretary and was indefatigable in searching for a suitable site for this Hall. The capital funds arising from the sale of Mortimer Hall and 23 Bedford Square were available, and after a weary search an exceptionally good freehold site in a central district was discovered at 12 Gloucester Place, W. 1, now, owing to a readjustment of street numbering, No. 50.



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See also *Psypioneer*: Volume 3. No 4. April 2007:—*The Yorkshire Fairies (The Return of the Fairies)*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.4April07.pdf>

<sup>36</sup>.—*News and Notes*, March 1930.

<sup>37</sup>.—Mrs. Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, died at Adyar, India, on Wednesday, September 20th, in her eighty-sixth year: See *Psypioneer* Volume 4. No 10. October 2008:—*Passing of Mrs. Annie Besant*:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.10October08.pdf>

<sup>38</sup>.—Minutes of the Executive Committee, *News and Notes*, October 1933.

A minute of the proceedings of the National Council runs: "The General Secretary reported that the Executive Committee had completed the purchase of the freehold of 12 Gloucester Place, W. 1, for a new Headquarters, with sufficient space at the rear of the property for the erection of the Annie Besant Memorial Hall."<sup>39</sup>

In June of the same year, Mrs. Ransom wrote: "We are now settled in our delightful new Headquarters, and find them very commodious, light, and when the workmen really leave us, easy to run. We are far more centrally situated, and even though this means more noise from the traffic, members and visitors will find it easy to reach us, and they will receive a warm welcome.

"On the ground floor is the Enquiry Room, a small Lecture Room which will hold about 150 quite comfortably, and the Members' Room, looking very charming, where teas are served every day at 4 p.m. . . . On the first floor the fine Library occupies the whole space and is most attractive. There is now a large and quiet Reading Room where arrangements are made for students to work. Every effort is made to render the Library of real service to all, for it is one of the best of its kind in London. On the second floor are to be found the offices of the General Secretary, Treasurer, Publicity Secretary and Registrar.

"The decorations are all in white and gold and give an attractive effect of light and space.

"As there are still many details to attend to before we are in complete working order, we will not have our 'House Warming' until October 1st. Then we will celebrate Dr. Besant's birthday and dedicate our new home to the service of the Masters. Our new President, Dr. Arundale, has kindly consented to do this, and I hope as many as possible will try to be present, not only to show their interest in Headquarters but also to greet Dr. Arundale as President.

Do remember—a cordial welcome is yours at your new Headquarters."<sup>40</sup>

During 1934-36 the promised Hall was built at the rear of Headquarters. It is delightfully designed in a modern style which is both simple and dignified. It seats 400, is beautifully lighted, and is fitted with every modern facility for the showing of films as well as for the production of concerts and small plays. The accoustics are exceptionally good. By the use of loud speakers and extensions into the main building Convention audiences of 650 and more can be accommodated. Mrs. Ransom had all the wear and tear of seeing through the troublesome details of the building of the Hall which cost £10,000, and the first public lecture was delivered in it by Mrs. Adelaide Gardner, the present General Secretary, on Sunday, 5 April 1936. Since then the Hall has been in constant use. It was thought that the name originally proposed was a trifle long, so it is now known as "Besant Hall."

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<sup>39</sup>.—*News and Notes*, February, 1934.

<sup>40</sup>.—*News and Notes*, June 1934.

## BOOKS WE HAVE REVIEWED

*If you have any problems locating a copy we can contact the author*

**An Extraordinary Journey:—The Memoirs of a Physical Medium**, by Stewart Alexander, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England, 2010. Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9557050-6-9, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 294-296:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP6.11November2010.pdf>

**Helen Duncan the Mystery Show Trial**, by Robert Hartley published by H Pr (Publishing), London 2007. Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9553420-8-0. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 244-247:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.11November07..pdf>

**Aquarian Evangelist: The Age of Aquarius as It Dawned in the Mind of Levi Dowling**, by John Benedict Buescher Theosophical History Volume XI available at:—then—Occasional Papers. Psypioneer references by Leslie Price page 7:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08.pdf>

**Dead Men's Embers**, by Gerald O'Hara, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England 2006. Large Paperback ISBN:—978-0-9514534-6-9, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 1-2:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

**Mrs Miller's Gift' – a Celebration of 75 Years of the Edinburgh College of Parapsychology formerly Edinburgh Psychic College & Library**, by Gerald O'Hara & Ann Harrison, published by Saturday Night Press Publications, England 2007. Paperback ISBN: 978-0-951-4534-9-0, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 1-4:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08..pdf>

**Mrs Miller's Gift CD:—Helen Duncan Séance, Ernest Oaten and Harry Edwards**, Written and produced by Gerald O'Hara B.Sc. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 106-107:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.4April09.pdf>

**The Indescribable Phenomena – The Life and Mysteries of Anna Eva Fay**, by Barry H. Wiley published by Hermetic Press, Inc., Seattle Washington 2005. ISBN: 0-945296-50-9, available at:—[http://www.hermeticpress.com/product\\_info.php?products\\_id=45](http://www.hermeticpress.com/product_info.php?products_id=45) Psypioneer references by Leslie Price pages 39-42:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.2February09.pdf>

**Immortal Longings – FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death**, by Trevor Hamilton published by Imprint Academic in Exeter, U.K (also VA, U.S.A) 2009. ISBN: 9-781845- 401238 H.B, 9-781845-402488 PB, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Leslie Price pages 157-148:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP5.6June09.pdf>

**Talking to the Dead – Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism**, by Barbara Weisberg published by HarperSanFrancisco New York 2004. Hardback ISBN: 0-06-056667-1, available at Amazon. Psypioneer review, by Paul J. Gaunt pages 9-10:—[http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP2.pdf](http://woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP2.pdf)

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Paul J. Gaunt

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