

# PSYPIONEER

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## WHAT IS KNOWN OF THE HYDESVILLE PEDDLER?

The story of Hydesville, when a murdered peddler communicated with two young girls in 1848, is often considered the foundation of Modern Spiritualism.

In the SNU's publication, '100 Years of National Spiritualism' (1990), p.7 Jean Bassett states:

*"Katie and Margaret Fox are the first people on modern record to hold a form of conversation with Spirit. It is a fact, that they devised a code whereby questions could be answered, that made the phenomena taking place in their home so interesting".*

The S.N.U., educational programme C20 (SD1. Jan 99) Section 1: The History of Modern Spiritualism student course notes reads

*"An alphabetical code was established, including one rap for 'no' and two raps for 'yes', and the instigator of the raps was able to tell them that he was a peddler named Charles B. Rosna who had, in 1843, been murdered by a man called John C. Bell, who was a former tenant of the house, and his body had been hidden in the cellar".*

Unfortunately, these sweeping statements are only fragments of the events recorded at the time. My research has highlighted many errors which with time have distorted the facts of the original story. Much of this was not deliberate, but others were intended to perhaps sensationalise or discredit the events.

Taking a step back from the 1848 Hydesville phenomena, one could almost remove the Fox sisters! In reality Katie and Margaret had very little participation in the unfolding events, and their names rarely appear in the original story. Moreover,

although the early growth of Modern Spiritualism was attributed to the Hydesville events and delivered by the Fox sisters, the Hydesville phenomena predated the Fox girls' involvement of 1848.

Any enquiry into the original events leads to an impartial printed report published by Mr. E.E. Lewis. This contained the statements of the Fox family as well as the citizens of Hydesville and its vicinity, all of whom had either witnessed or participated at the house of Mr. John D. Fox. The report was entitled, '*A Report of the Mysterious Noises, Heard in the House of Mr. John D. (David) Fox, in Hydesville, Arcadia, Wayne County, Authenticated by the Certificates, and Confirmed by the Statements of the Citizens of that Place and Vicinity.*' It contained twenty-two signed statements dated between 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April 1848 certifying the events, before and after the night of March 31<sup>st</sup> 1848. The events were terrifying to the Fox family and caused ill health to Mrs. Fox in particular.

My purpose at this time is chiefly to look at how the name of Charles B. Rosna, which famously graces the annals of Spiritualism, came to be known.

On the celebrated night of March 31<sup>st</sup> 1848, intelligent communication was made in the home of Mr. & Mrs. John D. Fox. Mrs. Fox's youngest daughter Katie found that as fast as she could make a noise, with her hands or fingers, the sound was repeated giving the same number of noises. Margaret who had, in jest, begun a 'follow my lead' said, (1) "Now do this just as I do. Count one, two, three, four" Each time she clapped it was repeated by the noise; Margaret only did this sequence once as she became startled. This test, giving rise to a method of communication, showed the 'communication' was intelligent. In continuance from the now fearful child, Mrs. Fox asked the 'noise' to count to ten; it made ten noises, and then the noises sounded out the ages of her children.

Silence was apparent in answer to the question of human intervention. If a spirit? The 'noise' should answer with a double 'rap' in confirmation. It was further found by Mrs. Fox that the spirit had been injured and the person responsible was still living. The remains were buried under the dwelling. Asked of age, 31 raps sounded. It sounded that it was male, had a family of five children, two sons and three daughters and his wife was dead for two years. With the agreement of the spirit, neighbours were called upon. Mrs. Redfield was called immediately; she called her husband who in turn called Mr. & Mrs. Duesler. Mr. & Mrs. Hyde came and then Mr. & Mrs. Jewell.

Mr. Duesler asked questions, many of which had already been put by those present. He asked if 'it' had been murdered; an audible reply was heard. Asked then if the guilty party could be punished by law – silence. It was further ascertained that the murder had taken place in the bedroom about five years previously and had been committed by Mr. John Bell on a Tuesday night at 12 o'clock. Its throat having been cut with a butcher's knife, the body had been taken to the cellar, but not buried until the next night. It was not taken through the outside door, but through the buttery, down the stairway and buried ten feet below the surface.

Mr William Duesler, (Statement signed April 12<sup>th</sup> 1848), had learned much from the 'conversations'. Not only had the cause of death, resting place and culprit been made known, but the alphabet had been used to determine the initials of the deceased as being C & B, no other letters being affirmed. The deceased was a peddler, his children lived in Orleans County, and a trunk and sack carried his wares. A sum of \$500.00 and the confiscation of these wares were the apparent motive for the brutal killing. The act had been carried out by only one person, the other residents Mrs. Bell and her help Miss. Lucretia Pulver being away from the house at the time. Mr. Duesler finally left the Fox residence at around midnight of the 31<sup>st</sup>, but the 'rapping' would continue for at least another two weeks.

Mrs. Elizabeth Jewell, one of the first attendees of the 31<sup>st</sup> made a signed statement dated April 14<sup>th</sup> 1848. She had been often present, asking questions of her own. Her statement mentions Mrs. Fox again questioning the peddler on 13<sup>th</sup> April asking:

*(2) "How many moments it was dying when it was murdered? There were six raps, louder than I ever heard it before. How many hours the body lay in that room? It rapped six times". Is (Mr Bell) sorry he committed the murder? Rap, rap (yes). How many coats did (Mrs Bell) rip to pieces and alter over after the murder? It rapped two? Rap a little louder? And the rap was more distinct. Did those coats belong to the murdered man? There was one rap (yes).*

Mr. David S Fox first witnessed the question and answer sessions on the evening of Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> April 1848. He states that committees were chosen and placed in different parts of the house so as to detect any possible human deception. Attempts had been made to expose the burial site, but after a few feet of exposure the efforts were hampered and stopped by water seepage, he himself attempting to pump out the water Tuesday evening, but having to give up.

Mr. Lewis not only obtained signed statements from those present on and after the 31<sup>st</sup> March, but also from those who had resided at the house prior to the Fox family, as well as those who had worked for the accused Mr John Bell.

Mr. Michael and Mrs. Hannah Weekman were the previous tenants to the Fox family. They had lived in the house for about 18 months. Approximately a year before the 31<sup>st</sup> March occurrences, Mr. Weekman had been driven to search the house for the person who was making all the knocking sounds. The couple and their hired help, Mrs. Jane Lape, had been woken one night by the screams of the couple's eight-year-old daughter. After much quietening down the child was able to tell her parents that she was frightened by something cold moving over her body, but was particularly startled when it reached her head and face. Mr. Weekman had been called by name, but could not find the source. Mrs. Weekman was very often afraid after hearing strange noises in and around the house.

Mrs. Lape whilst in the Weekmans' employ had been doing work in the kitchen. It was about 2pm and in the bedroom adjoining the kitchen, she saw a man through the opened door. The man stood facing her saying nothing, and there were no other sounds audible to her. She did not recognise the man especially from his attire of

(3) “grey pants, black frock coat, and black cap”. Frightened, she left the room to fetch Mrs. Weekman. At their return the bedroom was empty.

Miss. Lucretia Pulver lived and worked at the Fox house prior to the Weekman family. She was in the employ of the accused and his wife. She states that in the latter part of her time in the house, she heard frequent knocking in the bedroom at night under the foot of the bed.

(4) *“One night I thought I heard a man walking in the buttry. This buttry is near the bed-room, with a stairway between them. Miss. Aurelia Losey staid with me on that night; she also heard the noise, and we were both much frightened, and got up and fastened down the windows and fastened the door. It sounded as if the person walked through the buttry, down cellar, and part way across the cellar bottom, and there the noise ceased. There was no one else in the house at this time, except my little brother, who was asleep in the same room with us”.*

About a week later Mrs. Bell sent Lucretia down the cellar to close the outside door. She had fallen near the centre of the room, as it was uneven and loose in this spot. When asked by Mrs. Bell why she had screamed Mrs. Bell told her that the holes had been made by rats. A few days after that Mr. Bell was known to have carried lots of soil into the cellar where he spent much time. She was informed that the rat holes were being filled.

A few days before Lucretia had started hearing the noises, a foot peddler called upon the Bell household. She was told her services were no longer required and was sent home. Mrs. Bell was to spend the night in Lock Berlin. Lucretia had wanted to buy some goods from the peddler, but had no money on her, so had arranged to meet him at her home the next morning, but she didn't see him again. After about three days Lucretia was asked back to board at the Bells' house and commenced her schooling. About a week later Mrs. Bell said Lucretia should stay at home to do the housework as she had some coats to fix for her husband. She said that they were too large and old fashioned. Lucretia last saw the coats ripped to pieces ready for the alterations.

The peddler Lucretia had met was around 30 years old. She had heard him talking to Mrs. Bell about his family and children but could not recall the details. Mrs. Bell told her that he was an old acquaintance of theirs. She gave Lucretia a thimble she had bought from the peddler for 50 cents. Visiting Mrs. Bell three months later, she was shown another thimble the peddler had sold her and she was told he had tried to cheat her. (see also note following “ Did the peddler exist?”)

Mrs. Bell also spoke about hearing noises in the house that she could not account for. This was given in a statement from Lucretia's mother Mrs. Anna Pulver, 11<sup>th</sup> April 1848.

Due to the serious allegations made against Mr. Bell, (who was now living in the town of Lyons), by his previous neighbours, Mr. Lewis published a certificate on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1848 signed in support of his upright character and of him being incapable of committing crime. Forty-four gave their names in support of John Bell; this included many who had witnessed the Hydesville phenomena and made signed statements.

The signed statements I have briefly referred to show no major contradictions. Each is in agreement that there could have been no fraudulent opportunity for human intervention. The phenomena were witnessed for over a two week period and there were no set times when the phenomena occurred. There can therefore be little argument that true phenomena (or an extremely well orchestrated deception) occurred in this little hamlet. It must also be noted that during this period, and even before 31<sup>st</sup> March, the events occurred in different parts of the house and involved different people at differing times.

These statements I believe give the only documented true account of the Hydesville phenomena, the basis of what was to lead to Modern Spiritualism. But Lewis's report was not widely published and by the late 1850's was a very scarce document. None of the recorded communications came from either Katie or Margaret except the initial clapping etc., as supposed by many book, articles and organisations. It can also be noted that the full name of the communicator had not as yet been given.

### **Capron's evidence**

The first major historian on the early growth of Modern Spiritualism and the mediumship of the three Fox sisters was Eliab Wilkinson Capron, 'Modern Spiritualism: Its Facts and Fanaticisms, its Consistencies and Contradictions' 1855.

Capron printed extracts from Lewis' report, describing the testimony as (5) '*unimpeachable and conclusive of the first occurrences at Hydesville*'. Capron continues at the point after the Lewis report, referring to other manifestations beginning to exhibit themselves:

(6) "*Thus, the intelligence claiming to be the spirit of the murdered man would produce a sound like the death struggle, the gurgling in the throat, of a man whose throat was cut; then the sound of dragging a lifeless body across the room, down the stairs, the feet striking on each step; then a sound as if shovelling dirt in the cellar, the nailing of boards, and the filling up the hastily-made grave, all sounding as perfectly natural as if you had stood in the grave-yard, and heard the clods descended upon the last resting-place of the body of a friend*".

(7) It was at some point after this, that the youngest sister, Katie, while living at her brother's (David Fox's) home about 2/3 miles from Hydesville, began to show signs of her mediumship. The family, as Capron records, were weary of the annoyance to which they had been subjected (referring to Hydesville). Kate as she became known was taken to Rochester by her elder sister, Leah, only for the family to find that as Kate departed, the mediumship of Margareta began.

(8) During the summer of 1848, David Fox and others continued the digging at the Hydesville house. With the water levels down in the cellar and after digging about five feet they came to a plank. Digging further, they found several human teeth, a few bones and hair. No skull or connecting bones were found. There was a quantity of charcoal found at the same depth, showing that at some point the ground had been disturbed and items deposited.

(9)Capron shows very little interest in the identity of the spirit causing so many disturbances, and makes an error or adjustment on the important statement of William Duesler. Duesler through reciting the alphabet gave the initials of C and B. In Capron's reprint of the statement, the B becomes R giving C.R. Thus the first full historical record printed in book form, the template of information used by many other authors as reference, has an error. (Also perhaps less important, is Capron's incorrect recording of the date. He said William Duesler's statement was signed April 19<sup>th</sup> 1848 when in fact it was signed April 12<sup>th</sup>.)

In fact, Capron refers only briefly to David Fox seeking the name of the murdered man, (10)“*They were desirous of getting the name of the man purporting to have been murdered. After trying various expedients, David S. Fox asked if it would answer to the initial letter of the name they would call the alphabet. This was answered in the affirmative, and the letters were accordingly given*”. No additional information is given and I suspect that this is another error on Capron's part, that he is in fact referring to William Duesler, and not David Fox.

Thus, Capron adds to the Hydesville story mainly details of the partial remains as found in the cellar. He refers to Isaac Post re-instating the alphabet 'method, and remarks (16)“*David had a name spelled out by the alphabet, at Hydesville, but that nothing had ever been obtained by that means, since, either at Hydesville or anywhere else*”. It is worth noting that Capron in his book changed some of the grammar referenced from the Lewis report and makes a number of other errors and subtle changes.

### **Later accounts**

Robert Dale Owen adds his version of the night of 31<sup>st</sup> March 1848. He based this narrative on the meeting he had with Mrs., Margaret, Kate and David Fox in August 1859 at the home of David Fox. He was also given the opportunity to view the old Fox house, now occupied by a farm labourer. His relaying of the events was not written as Lewis and Capron had theirs; Owen's was more novel-like, and brought another word into the Hydesville event. (12)“*Here, old Splitfoot, do as I do!*” These words, according to Owen, were spoken by Kate; just prior to the events of March 31<sup>st</sup>. Mrs. Fox's statement had quoted Margaret as saying, “*Now do this just as I do*”. With eleven years between event and research, as in Owen's case, reiterations can become unreliable!\*

Owen does keep fairly well to the facts of the documented story from Lewis and Capron, but does enlarge upon some points. For example, he gives new ages to the Fox girls, contradicting the earlier statement of Mrs. Fox. He enlarges upon the summer of 1848 when David Fox and co., recommenced the digging in the cellar. He adds, (19)“*on examination by a medical man skilled in anatomy, proved to be portions of a human skeleton, including two bones of a hand and certain parts of the skull; but no connected skull was found.*” also “*several pieces of crockery.....*”. These verbal extras were made following the visit to David Fox, but with no supporting

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\* the term “ Splitfoot” has not received the attention it deserves. In folklore, it could mean “ The Devil” or an evil spirit. How seriously Kate believed she was in touch with such a spirit is uncertain. More relevant to this in the next issue. – Ed.

documentation especially as to the identity of the 'medical man'. It is interesting to note that as with Capron, Owen was very friendly with the Fox family writing some if not all of 'Footfalls' whilst a guest of three months at the home of the eldest Fox sister, Leah.

The name Charles B. Rosma is given by Robert Dale Owen in 1860 throughout 'Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World'. This reference seems to be the earliest printed reference to the peddler's full name according to my research to date, except for Spicer's, 'Charles Rayn', which has a possible connection to Capron's recorded initials of 'CR'.

It can be said fairly confidently that most reports into Hydesville refer to the books of Capron and Owen as well as the original Lewis report. However, one book pre-dating Capron's 'Modern Spiritualism' was Henry Spicer 'Sights and Sounds: The Mystery of the Day', published in 1853. Spicer's coverage of Hydesville refers to Duesler's alphabet calling and prints a supposedly given name, (but not initials), of <sup>(13)</sup>Charles Rayn. Could this be an error on the author's part? I have made reference to Capron making an 'error or adjustment' in Duesler's statement by his recording C.R., as oppose to Lewis' C.B. Certainly CR fits with Spicer's Charles Rayn, (CR); Capron (as already quoted) had shown no interest in the peddler's full name.

Mr. Duesler played the most constructive part in the events. He along with Mrs. Fox made it apparent that there was an intelligence behind the phenomena. Through their questions we have almost all that is known of the supposed communicator. Apart from, the initial sounds made by the Fox girls, Katie and Margaret, they seem to have played no other part in the unfolding events. The recorded statements make very few references to the girls throughout. This is further emphasised by William Howitt in 'The History of The Supernatural' (1863) who quotes Robert Dale Owen talking about Katie and the night of the 31<sup>st</sup>, and adds <sup>(14)</sup>*"It is to Mrs. Fox, rather than her daughter, that we are indebted for following it out."*

Epes Sargent published, although anonymously at the time, a very comprehensive book entitled, 'Planchette; or, The Despair of Science' in 1869. Sargent records,

*(11) "About three weeks after these occurrences, David, son of Mr. And Mrs. Fox, went alone into the cellar, where the raps were then being heard, and said, "if you are a spirit of a human being who once lived on the earth, can you rap to the letters that will spell your name? And if so, now rap three times" Three raps were promptly given, and David proceeded to call the alphabet, writing down the letters as they were indicated; and the result was the name, 'Charles B. Rosma'".*

In 1870 Emma Hardinge published, 'Modern American Spiritualism'. Here she stated that again David Fox obtained the full name of <sup>(15)</sup>'Charles B. Rosna' whilst present in the Hydesville house cellar. It would seem that Hardinge misspells the name 'Rosma', I believe it unlikely she would introduce a new name to the story without explanation. The point is we do not know if the peddler's name was Rosma, Rosna or Rayn. It could even have been Ross or Rosmer as Arthur Conan Doyle pointed out ('History of Spiritualism, vol. 1 p.79, 1975 Arno edition) These errors have certainly fully obscured the man's true identity.

'The Missing Link in Modern Spiritualism', by A (Anne) Leah Underhill published in 1885, begins with the statements from the original Lewis report. Quite amazingly without any reference or notation to any changes, Leah adds extra information to her mother's original statement of April 11<sup>th</sup> 1848, some 20 years after her death in 1865. Leah adds to Owen's 'old Splitfoot', now calling him (20) 'Mr. Splitfoot', and a new statement from Katie, (20) "*Then Cathie (This is the name she was called by her mother, and close family) said, in her childish simplicity: 'O mother, I know what it is; to-morrow is April-fool day, and it's somebody trying to fool us'*". Leah, like Capron makes no mention of the peddler's name.

This simple story has spiralled into a mixture of misinformation, errors, speculation and sensationalism. Harry Boddington's 'The University of Spiritualism' of 1947 fits these criteria. He states William Duesler gave the name (21) Charles B. Rosna. And Earl Wesley Fornell in 'The Unhappy Medium', 1964 produced a lovely illustrated book, but his narration of Hydesville is completely mixed up resulting in (22) Charles B. Rosana being the murderer!

Many authors are cautious with regard to the name, but so far we have:

William Duesler – 'Lewis report April 1848 the initials of C.B. (p14)

Henry Spicer – 'Sights and Sounds', 1853 the name Charles Rayn. (p15)

Eliab Capron – 'Modern Spiritualism' 1855 the initials C.R. (p47)

Robert Dale Owen – 'Footfalls' 1860 the name Charles B. Rosma. (p210)

Emma Hardinge – 'Modern American Spiritualism' 1870, the initial B, also the name Charles B. Rosna and the initials C.B. (p36)

Earl Wesley Fornell – 'The Unhappy Medium', the name Charles B. Rosana. (14)

## Conclusions

It is clear that the claims of the SNU as quoted at the onset of this paper, such as '*Katie and Margaret Fox are the first people on modern record to hold a form of conversation with spirit. It is a fact, that they devised a code whereby questions could be answered...*' – are not correct. It was Mrs. Fox, William Duesler and various others as indicated in the original report that were responsible for the intelligent communication with the phenomena. Primarily, it was Mrs. Fox who established a communicative 'code' in the form of 'raps'. Mr. Duesler formed the alphabet code as used by David Fox in the cellar and later by Isaac Post. Admittedly, by late summer, early autumn of 1848 the calling of the alphabet was made famous by the 'now' mediums Kate and Margaret Fox, followed closely by their elder sister Leah.

The second SNU quote was "*An alphabetical code was established, including one rap for 'no' and two raps for 'yes', and the instigator of the raps was able to tell them that he was a peddler named Charles B. Rosna who had, in 1843, been murdered by a man called John C. Bell, who was a former tenant of the house, and his body had been hidden in the cellar*". However, there was at this time no established alphabetical code; this was to come later. The raps did not tell 'them' (Katie and Margaret), the name of the peddler.

It remains uncertain just how true the story of the murdered peddler is (see also Dr Coleman's note which follows.). It does seem certain however, that phenomena took

place at the Hydesville house over a number of years. This is evident from statements of people present at the time as well as those prior to the Fox family's residence.

If it were not for the night of March 31<sup>st</sup> 1848 and the stir it caused in the neighbourhood, these events may well have been dismissed as just one of many strange and unexplained happenings. But the impact upon so many people, as evident from the Lewis report, heightened the response to the event. Curiosity was sparked so that hundreds of people bore witness over the coming weeks.

It is clear that what was communicated and ascertained from and about the phenomenon, was obtained primarily during the evening of March 31<sup>st</sup> by Mrs. Fox and William Duesler. We also know that Duesler instigated the 'calling of the alphabet' method of communication on March 31<sup>st</sup> thus obtaining the initials 'CB'. Some years later it is claimed that David Fox, adopting the same method, obtained the name 'Charles B. Rosma'. This we are told occurred about three weeks post March 31<sup>st</sup>, but there seems to be no evidential documentation supporting this claim, so presumably the full name was distributed verbally. Duesler's 'method' was not used again for another four months, being re-instated by a Fox family friend, Isaac Post. The 'method' was as we know made famous by the Fox sisters, often referred to as the 'Rochester Rappers', (interestingly not the Hydesville Rappers).

There are some early pamphlets etc., dating from around 1850 which I have been unable to obtain, but it is doubtful any more information could be given that has not already been quoted. The main references I have used are from first edition works. The Lewis report is a facsimile of the original document, which is now almost impossible to obtain. In fact Arthur Conan Doyle while researching 'The History of Spiritualism', was unable to get an original copy of the 40-page pamphlet.

The SNU's Education exponents course notes conclude in part "*All of this was subsequently discovered to be true*". But Rosna, as he is referred to by the SNU, was never traced, nor were his children. This may have been due to the misinterpretation or misspelling from the communication with David Fox. Perhaps none of the communications was recorded in writing, thus giving rise to verbal errors.

The graphic accounts received and related in the Lewis report can never be confirmed or denied. The suspected murderer John C. Bell was, as far as is known, never charged or even suspected by the authorities. Although human remains were discovered in the cellar walls in 1904 apparently with a peddler's tin, these remains do not constitute proof that they were those of the allegedly murdered peddler. (The spirit was insistent when questioned by Duesler that his remains were in the centre of the cellar. If the body were moved by Bell, as some suspect, this would not explain why the spirit of the body would not be aware of its new location. It would also be difficult to explain why some bones were also found in the centre of the cellar. )

With all that has been experienced over the years in Spiritualism, coupled with its philosophical views, we are very aware that spirit messages are not necessarily correct or truthful. We would strongly advise against the use of ouija boards as experience had taught we could be opening the door to all kinds of influences good and bad alike. Hydesville in my opinion may well have been a similar scenario. Possibly a wronged man was seeking revenge for his murder by Bell But although the Lewis report and

Capron's book provide good records of what took place, neither gives proof of the identity of the so called 'wronged man' or of Bell's involvement, if any.

This brings me back to my original purpose, to take an objective look at Hydesville, in my mind the seat of Modern Spiritualism. Hydesville showed the individuality of an unseen presence capable of communicating consistently correct answers to hundreds of people over a period of weeks. It offered the possibility of a sentient spiritual presence communicating from beyond death. It showed through the alleged Hydesville peddler that death does not bring an all knowing spiritual life, but a continuation of the former life in flesh. This knowledge and the wider teachings of Andrew Jackson Davis and other reformers - phenomena and philosophy together - aided the birth of Modern Spiritualism.

The Fox sisters continued where the Hydesville phenomena left off. They demonstrated that what took place at their family home was not just an unexplained supernatural event, but a natural phenomenon which could be cultivated, developed and manifested through mediumship. This is where the role of the Fox sisters came to fruition. Not during the unfolding Hydesville events, but in the first steps afterwards. Firstly Kate, then Margaret and followed by Leah – The Rochester Rappers.  
Paul J. Gaunt.

### **References**

- 1) Lewis p6.
- 2) Lewis p19
- 3) Lewis p35
- 4) Lewis p36
- 5) Capron p51
- 6) Capron p51
- 7) Capron p54: Reference point.
- 8) Capron p53: Reference point.
- 9) Capron p47: Reference point
- 10) Capron p53
- 11) Sargent p32/3
- 12) Owen p207
- 13) Spicer p59
- 14) Howitt p191
- 15) Hardinge p36
- 16) Capron p64
- 17) Owen p207
- 18) Owen p208
- 19) Owen p211
- 20) Underhill p7
- 21) Boddington p11
- 22) Fornell p14.

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**DID THE PEDDLER EXIST?**

Among the sceptical responses to the Hydesville phenomena are traces of the claim that the peddler was not dead, or even did not exist. Dr Michael Coleman draws attention to:

- 1) P.T. Barnum “ The Humbugs of the World” ( London, John Camden Hotten, Piccadilly, 1866 ) retells the Hydesville story, but adds (p. 57):

*“ Soon after that, the missing pedlar (sic-PP) re-appeared in Hydesville, still “ clothed with mortality,” and having a new assortment of wares to sell. “*

This is quoted with approval in Lionel A. Weatherly “ The Supernatural? with chapter on Oriental Magic, Spiritualism and Theosophy, by J.N. Maskelyne” (Bristol and London, 1891).

*“ However, it must have been a terrible blow to the Fox family when the murdered pedlar (sic-LP) turned up again alive and well, “ still clothed with mortality, and having a new assortment of wares to sell.”*

- 2) Slater Brown “ The Heyday of Spiritualism” (New York 1970) declares in contrast:

*“ The mysterious peddler himself was never located, though the raps had at one time spelled out his name and given his residence as Orleans County. A search was made, but no trace of him or his five children was ever discovered.” (p.106)*

Herbert G.Jackson “ The Spirit Rappers” New York, 1972) writes similarly:

*“ No charges were ever brought against John Bell – the testimony of a spirit doesn’t carry much weight in court- but Bell threatened a few himself. Nor was the existence of a Charles Rosna family in Orleans County ever established.”*

The only testimony to the existence of the peddler comes from statement of Miss Lucretia Pulver signed April 11th 1848, who quotes Mrs Bell as saying the peddler had made a return visit after the time of the supposed disappearance. As earlier mentioned:

*About three months after this time I visited her, (Mrs Bell) and she said that this pedler had been there again, and showed me another thimble which she said she had bought of him. She said that he had cheated her; that he sold it to her for pure silver, but it was only German silver. She also showed me some other things, which she said she had brought of him.*

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Moreover, there appears to have been a second peddler in the area. Paul Gaunt draws attention to a report in Capron “ Modern Spiritualism” (1855) p.60-1

*As a specimen of the credulity with which some persons received the phenomena, it may be well to relate, without giving the names, an occurrence which caused considerable excitement in Rochester and vicinity. In the month of July or August, 1848, a young man- a tobacco pedler-came into the city with his horses, put them up at the stable of a hotel, and very suddenly disappeared. He was known to have had several hundred dollars with him, and his friends and the public were satisfied that he was murdered for sake of the money. Days and weeks elapsed, and no tidings of the missing man could be obtained. The authorities offered a large reward for the discovery of the body and detection of the murderers. The canal, the mill-races and by-places were searched to no purpose. In the midst of the excitement, one of the most enthusiastic spiritualists took up the subject, with the double hope of obtaining the reward and establishing the infallibility of spiritual communication. First a clairvoyant made a revelation of the murder, and where the body was deposited. It was said to be in the canal, and the place was pointed out. Of course, so positive a man as the one engaged in this hunt could get spirits enough to confirm his already settled convictions, and it was accordingly confirmed by the rappings. Then commenced the search. The canal was dragged at the places pointed out, but no body found. The oracles were again consulted, and now they were informed that the body had been removed to another place. That was searched with like results;-and, after a fruitless search, they were informed that it was again removed.*

*The superintendent of canal repairs gave notice that, on a certain day, the water would be drawn out of the canal from near the Genesee Valley canal junction, in that city, to the Brighton lock. Immediately on this announcement being made, it was*

*revealed that the body had been removed to a point below the Brighton lock; and that the wife of the gentleman engaged in the search should go into the water, and also a little girl about twelve years old. It was said that they would be sure and find the body. The confiding man and wife, with the girl, repaired to the spot, and commenced the search in the water. The lady had a rope tied around her waist, and the husband held the other end, standing on a canal bridge. Once or twice the lady got beyond her depth, and was only saved from drowning by the precaution of having the rope around her, -which, by the way, the spirits had forbid-den her to use, - and the little girl cut her foot severely by a stone or shell on the bottom of the canal. After a long trial, the search was abandoned, and the body was not found.*

Probably the mystery would never have been revealed to this day, had not the supposed murdered man himself made the revelation. He was anxious to retain what money he had in his possession, and being willing to be thought murdered, after leaving his team, had suddenly departed for Canada. Thus ended this credulous reliance on the infallibility of clairvoyance and spiritual revelations. The effect was to produce an entire reaction in the minds of those most concerned in the transaction, and they repudiated the whole affair, for a year or two, as the work of Satan, although they are now believers again, having "learned wisdom from the things they have suffered," and become more cool and rational. The tried friends of spiritualism have witnessed much of this kind of "backsliding" among persons who rushed into the belief with blind enthusiasm at the commencement, and were not grounded on reasonable investigation. With very few exceptions, they have, instead of looking calmly for the causes of false and unreliable directions, repudiated the whole as some deception beyond their knowledge to explain, or as emanating from the devil."

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## **SPR DECLINED INVITATION TO INVESTIGATE VOICE MEDIUM**

The Society for Psychical Research Council rejected an invitation to investigate the voice medium John Sloan, even when Arthur Findlay offered to pay the expenses. Professor David Fontana, a former SPR president discusses this case in his paper "Survival research: opposition and future developments" which appears in JSPR October 2004 (vol. 68 p193-209.)

Fontana writes:

*"Arthur Findlay (1951) tells us that Sir William Barrett, who along with the respected journalist, Dawson Rogers, had proposed the foundation of the SPR, arranged for a series of sittings in London in 1925 with the physical medium, John Sloan, with whom Findlay had been working successfully for many years. The sittings went well, whereupon Findlay offered to pay the expenses for Sloan to remain in London and be thoroughly tested by the SPR. Barrett put the offer to the SPR Council, who to his disappointment turned it down. No reason was given, and Findlay consequently resigned his membership of the Society and in his will left his stately home, Stansted Hall, and a large sum of money to the Spiritualist (sic- ed. PP.) National Union." (p.194-5)*

More information about this incident appeared in JSPR 36 p. 388-392 (1952) when the book by Arthur Findlay “ Between Two Worlds “ cited by Fontana was reviewed by W.H. Salter:

*On pp. 342-3 Mr Findlay makes an attack on the Society which calls for a brief comment. He says that in 1925 he suggested to Sir William Barrett to put before the Society a proposal to investigate Sloan in London, Mr Findlay paying the expenses. He continues, 'Sir William went to the next Council meeting and put forward my offer. Much to his disappointment the Council turned it down with neither an explanation nor an expression of thanks, and, when he told me of its decision not to investigate Sloan's mediumship, he was not only disappointed but angry. That ended the matter and nothing was ever done. My reaction was to resign my membership of the Society.'*

*This is a charge against the Society of failure to perform its duty as an investigating body, and also of discourtesy to Mr Findlay. As regards the second and minor charge Barrett never laid the proposal formally before the Council, although he consulted some of the Officers. I remember very well hearing of the proposal, doubtless as being then Hon. Treasurer. What report Barrett gave Mr Findlay of his discussion with the Society's Officers I do not know, but if there was any failure of courtesy it was certainly not on the part of the Officers or Council. The other charge is a more serious one.*

*In bringing it Mr Findlay should in candour have mentioned a very material condition that he attached to his proposal, namely that the Society should engage Sloan as caretaker at Tavistock Square. While the Officers of the Society had no reason to regard Sloan as personally untrustworthy, they did not consider it good policy to allow a professional or semi-professional medium the free run at all hours of the day and night of premises where a large amount of highly confidential information was (and is) kept. Much of this information has been entrusted to the Society precisely because it could only come into the hands of officials specially charged with the duty of secrecy. Any suspicion that a medium has had access to material subsequently referred to in communications received through him or through any other medium goes far to discredit any evidential value that might otherwise attach to them. The best mediums realize that it is to their interest that no such cause for suspicion should occur. In this respect they show a better appreciation of evidential standards than Mr Findlay who, when informed of the reason why his proposal had been declined, light-heartedly brushed it aside.*

*Incidentally it may be mentioned that this incident occurred in 1923, not 1925, when the Society had no vacancy for a caretaker, and that Mr Findlay's reaction to resign did not take effect until 1932.”*

The full text of this review, which contains an assessment of the Sloan communications of great interest to survival researchers, is available to SPR members via the SPR web site, as is the entire content of SPR Proceedings and Journal since 1882. Students of the pioneers anywhere in the world should apply to join the SPR because its publications contain much data.

Some other remarks by Professor Fontana raise questions. Did Findlay leave money to the SNU? Mel Anthony, then manager of Stansted Hall, contributed a history of the college to *Psychic News* October 16 1999 where he revealed that the Union expected an endowment of £28,000 but a late Will by Findlay had omitted to include it. The SNU did not receive it. Findlay had first sat with Sloan in 1918.

(Additional research by Paul Gaunt.)

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## **PSYCHIC NEWS IN PERSPECTIVE**

The origin and history of the weekly Spiritualist newspaper “*Psychic News*” is sometimes confusing. The SNU web site states: *1932- Psychic News founded by Arthur Findlay under the editorship of Maurice Barbanell*. The web site of PN itself more modestly claims that Findlay was closely involved, along with Hannen Swaffer. The first issue appeared on 28 May 1932. Findlay’s own account in “*Looking Back*” recalls that soon after the publication of his book “*On the Edge of the Etheric*” in 1931, he received a letter from Maurice Barbanell asking him to write an article for PN.

*The newspaper had just been born, and it was only a week old, but his letter had effects much greater than the article I wrote. I met him a few days later and found that he, and the other founder of Psychic News, J.M. Rubens, required financial help to continue publication. This I contributed and we formed a company Psychic Press Ltd, to finance and manage this new Spiritualist journal.*

It will be seen that by his own account, Findlay did not found PN, but he certainly saved it from extinction, and as principal shareholder became controller of it for many years. Another perspective on these events was given by Maurice Barbanell himself in an article for *Psychic News*, reprinted in a special issue of the SNU’s own newsletter “*New Communicator*” of 14 July 1995 to mark their acquisition of PN. Around 1930 Barbanell was lecturing on Spiritualism throughout Britain with Hannen Swaffer. Jack Rubens was accountant to HS and later to MB. Merrifield a Spiritualist financier had offered financial help to enliven psychic journalism. Ernest Oaten had been invited to bring “*Two Worlds*” to London where HS and MB would enliven it free of charge. Oaten declined, perhaps suspecting that he would be sidelined.

Rubens then suggested MB should start a modern Spiritualist newspaper. MB hesitated, but that same evening in an Estelle Roberts sitting, was told by Red Cloud to get on with it - full time. (Red Cloud’s name for MB was always John the Scribe, supposedly a past life reference to MB promising to do this writing work in this life).

Seeking confirmation, MB sat with Kathleen Barkel whom he had never met. Her guide White Hawk told him that Northcliffe was interested in the projected newspaper. At the next sitting with Mrs Roberts, Red Cloud asked him if he was satisfied. He was, and Northcliffe and Stead then gave advice on the policy of the

newspaper – to be independent. (Stead allegedly communicated earlier at a Vyvyan Deacon séance that a new paper, called Psychic News, would be coming within six months.)

There was insufficient money for the new paper, but Red Cloud said “ You supply the faith, we will find the money”. HS declined to invest, which left Rubens and Barbanell with a joint capital of £666 13s 4d. (Swaffer did write many articles later.)

Barbanell states that he wrote to Findlay while planning the first issue. It was on the evening of his first meeting with Findlay that Red Cloud said in circle “ I have today sent you the man who is to supply the money”. MB told this to Findlay who agreed to invest £1000, which soon ran out. Findlay then increased his shareholding to £3000, but insisted on voting power and control. Findlay promised not to interfere editorially and he did not. PN soon became profitable.

It will be seen that in Barbanell’s account the newspaper is founded with much encouragement from spirit guides. MB and Findlay take decisions on that basis. The paper has a paranormal origin. Findlay is also seen by the other side as an essential part of the recipe for success. He is the man sent with the money.

Did Findlay know Barbanell and Swaffer already? They were after all three of the most famous Spiritualists in the country. Findlay had already published a best seller. MB and HS had lectured all over. Edwin Butler, then working at the Friendship Centre, Bayswater, London, recalls MB and HS coming in with a mock-up of the proposed new paper, and Findlay arriving separately to join them.

There is no published biography of Maurice Barbanell, and no autobiography, and until one is written, much remains unclear about this outstanding figure.

(Additional research by Paul Gaunt.)

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### **Notes by the Way - Terminological Inexactitudes**

According to a new book on Mary Conan Doyle “ It is interesting to note, under item 4 of Arthur’s will, that small bequests were to be made to the Spiritualist Alliance, the National Spiritual Union, the Psychic College, and the Spiritual Community.” It is interesting to note also, that none of these four names is exactly right. Over 7.5 m. Net pages, for example, refer to the Spiritual Community; and only 50,000 to the Spiritualist Community, with only a handful of those alluding to the one founded by Mrs St. Clair Stobart, so precision can be important.

Still, authors from within the psychic field – such as psychical researchers and Spiritualists, though we all make mistakes - would generally get it right - wouldn’t we? However, it isn’t always easy to check history. We report in this issue how a former SPR president, in the pages of its journal, accused the Council of that learned society of refusing out of prejudice to investigate a voice medium 80 years ago. In fact the charge had already been refuted, in the same journal 50 years ago. But it is difficult to get access to old journals. Fortunately, the SPR has put its Journal and Proceedings on line for members. Few could read much of it, but the database can be

searched, under the name of the medium for example. If an author does not do this, a second line of defence is the referee process. Behind them is the editor. Alarm bells ought to ring, when any charge of malpractice is made or financial matters are raised.

Another Psypioneer article- by Paul Gaunt – suggests that the SNU refers to the Fox Sisters in an exaggerated way, while the SNU claim that Arthur Findlay founded Psychic News would have come as a surprise to PN founder editor Maurice Barbanell. But recently the SNU has taken the management of its web site in house. The 2004 SNU Presidential Address also served notice that higher standards generally would be expected in the organisation. Opportunely, a new chairman has just taken office in the SNU Education Committee. A new committee is enquiring into SNU philosophy. So there is an opportunity to review historical material issued by that organisation.

Actually, it is by no means easy to sort out what happened at Hydesville or many other places famous in psychic history. And the past is always changing. So constant review and revision is necessary. All information, spoken, written or even electronic, may be terminologically inexact!

## LESLIE PRICE

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*(In 2003 was celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies (originally the Churches' Fellowship for Psychical Study). Previous attempts to form such bodies floundered, and it is an important historical question why the others failed, and this one succeeded. To help answer it, we are presenting a regular series of reports on the prehistory of the Fellowship)*

## **THE SECRET REPORT ON SPIRITUALISM**

When CFPS was formed in 1953, the painful memory remained of the mishandling by the Church of England of an enquiry into Spiritualism.

Francis Underhill, Dean of Rochester (later Bishop of Bath and Wells) had encouraged the Archbishop of Canterbury to set up this committee, and after consultation in the Bishops' Meeting, Cosmo Gordon Lang had formally appointed the committee in January 1937 William Temple, Archbishop of York, was aware of events, and was in constant dialogue with Lang, but statements that he co-appointed the committee are wrong (see below for more on Temple). It is Underhill, a leading Anglo-Catholic and writer on prayer, who deserves further study. Why did he press for this committee?

An explanation is offered by Fred Archer, Psychic News editor from 1953, who claimed to know well Rev. Maurice Elliott, who was a founder of CFPS. Archer's book "Exploring the Psychic World" (1966) is notable for having no index references to such other PN editors as Barbanell or Austen. In his account of the Secret Report, which it is interesting to compare with the earlier one by Barbanell cited below, Archer states:

*" It became Elliott's great desire to effect a rapprochement between the Anglican Church and Spiritualism. In 1935 he went to see Dr Francis Underhill, the Dean of Rochester, who was known to be interested in some aspects of psychical research.*

*Elliott found him willing to listen to the case for Spiritualism. Eventually he convinced the Dean that the time had come for the Church to make an investigation.” (p.175)*

The committee received written and oral evidence. Among others Ernest Oaten, editor of *Two Worlds* testified, as did Mercy Phillimore Secretary of the LSA, Nandor Fodor, and Judge Cyril Atkinson who was later to be first president of CFPSS.

But the committee was perhaps doomed from the outset. How could a church which could not agree on prayers for the dead, reach a common mind on mediumship, about which experienced psychical researchers could not agree? How could the Spiritualist wish for endorsement of their claims be reconciled with the Archbishop's wish to warn of the dangers?

The somewhat discursive report was delivered to Lang in January 1939. There were differing conclusions by the Majority and the Minority, the latter more negative and also advising non-publication of the report. The whole report was referred to the Bishops' Meeting of June 1939, which had a big agenda. Some bishops were critical, and they were generally against publication. Despite public protest, they reaffirmed this at their June 1940 meeting.

The Church had now got itself into a distressing position. Would the report have been held up if Spiritualism had been found untrue, asked *Psychic News*, which in 1940 obtained some inside information on its conclusions? What about the wish of the Majority signatories that the report be published? In 1947, the full conclusions of the Majority which were not without sympathy for Spiritualism, were leaked to *Psychic News*, but those of the Minority, which warned against Spiritualism, remained secret. Indeed the entire report remained officially secret until forty years had passed (there is a forty year rule for such documents in Lambeth Palace archives, though that was not generally known). Among those few permitted to read the report were Garth Moore and Robert Thouless.

The full text with commentary appeared in “*The Christian Parapsychologist*” March 1979. Another decade was to pass before the minutes of the Bishops Meetings were made available. All this material was republished in booklet form by CFPSS publications. Still more detail appeared in Rene Kollar's book “*Searching for Raymond*” (Lexington Books, 2000).

Bringing the full report into the public domain removed a very sore point which had prejudiced the question of Spiritualism in relation to Christianity for two generations. Today the Archbishop of York is a patron of CFPSS, while the Archbishop of Canterbury conferred a Lambeth doctorate on Michael Perry (CFPSS president) in 2003.

The full text of the report, not least the minority conclusions which have been neglected, is of historical importance. It provides a valuable snapshot of the psychic scene before it was changed by war. Some of the arguments, pro and con, are still relevant today.

**A greater role for Temple?**

Another perspective is given to these events by Maurice Barbanell, editor of *Psychic News* at the time the report was completed, in his book “ This is Spiritualism” (1959-later revised. p.143 ff.).

*The commission of inquiry into Spiritualism had its beginning early in 1937, when Dr William Temple, one of the greatest minds in the Church of England, was Archbishop of York. He was approached by Dr Underhill, then Dean of Rochester and later Bishop of Bath and Wells, and the Rev. G. Maurice Elliott, a north London vicar with a great experience of mediumship. When they urged Dr Temple that the time was ripe for the Church to inquire into Spiritualism, he agreed. This was a broad-minded action. Only three years earlier, in a public lecture at Glasgow, Dr Temple had stated: "It is positively undesirable that there should be experimental proof of man's survival of death." This was a view he had held for many years. Despite his expressed outlook, Dr Temple approached Dr Lang and a committee was formed to investigate Spiritualism.*

At that time, Maurice Elliott was a regular contributor to PN, so there is no reason to doubt that he did contact Temple, and that Underhill did so as well. But Kollar argues that it was Underhill’s direct contacts with Lang that were most important. To continue the quotation:

*After a systematic inquiry, from 1937 to 1939, which included holding seances with mediums, the ten members of the committee issued their findings. Seven of them, the most influential representatives, signed a unanimous majority report. The remaining three - one was a bishop's wife, another a bishop's secretary- signed a minority report of a "sitting on the fence" character. Broadly speaking, the majority report was favourable to Spiritualism. I have its text in front of me as I write. Its signatories include Dr Underhill, Dr W. R. Matthews, the Dean of St Paul's, Canon Harold Anson, Master of the Temple, Canon L. W. Grensted, Nolloth Professor of the Christian Religion at Oxford, Dr William Brown, the celebrated psychologist, and Mr P. E. Sandlands, K.C.*

*I was unpopular with Lambeth Palace for revealing the contents of this majority report. Indeed, my publication caused such a stir in national newspapers that the Archbishop of Canterbury asked a leading Spiritualist to use her influence to suppress the press clamour on this matter. She was Mrs M. A. St Clair Stobart, chairman of the Confraternity, which sought an alliance between the Church and Spiritualism.*

Barbanell’s source for his PN stories, especially that of 9 March 1940 which published the majority conclusions, was believed by Lambeth to be Baron Palmstierna, a witness to the committee who had been allowed by Lang to see the final report. It may be that Palmstierna spoke to Hannen Swaffer, who recalls in “ My Greatest Story “ (1945).

*“ That report might have remained forever a secret. But, when I was leaving a luncheon one day a diplomat told me that something ought to be done about the secret report. He knew it was favourable to us. He had seen a copy of the report. It turned out that other people had seen it too, and that there was no longer any secret about it. When I printed the facts in the “Daily Herald,” the row began.”*

Barbanell adds that later:

*When Dr Temple was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, I tried my utmost to persuade him to publish the report. We had a long correspondence, but I made no headway with him. The same Dr Temple who, in his crusading for social justice, showed that he was far in advance of his clerical colleagues, seemed to be almost a diehard in religion. And the same Dr Temple, who was fearless in many pronouncements on controversial matters of the day, made sure that I could not quote from his letters by marking them either "Confidential" or "Not for publication". By making the report known, I urged on him, it would dispel the belief that the Church resorted to evasion and suppression rather than face up to truth. Dr Temple, who would not budge, even intimated that he had taken a foremost part in urging that the report should not be published.*

Kollar alludes to this correspondence. Temple thought the 1939 Report was not good enough for publication. Barbanell concludes:

*I was able to publish the main conclusions of the majority report because at least one member objected to the results of the inquiry being buried in the archives of Lambeth Palace. Later, the majority report was printed in its entirety- not by the Church of England, but by Spiritualists.*

“ Later” is a reference to the much fuller 1947 leak when Barbanell was no longer editor of Psychic News (contrary to Kollar’s statement, but an error easily made since Barbanell did write a 1947 booklet “ Banned by the Church”).

Spiritualism was a live issue in the Church of England in the 1930s – we can now see Lang, Temple and other leaders wrestling with it. Several others involved in the 1939 report wrote books. But a solution with which all parties could live was not reached until well into the life of the Churches’ Fellowship.

**If you want to read the full text of the secret report, see “ Spiritualism” edited by Michael Perry (CFPSS 1999 £4.95 ISBN 0-902666-41-X).  
([www.churchesfellowship.freeseve.co.uk](http://www.churchesfellowship.freeseve.co.uk))**

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## **EVELYN HAD PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS**

One member of the Lang committee resigned early on, Evelyn Underhill an authority on the spiritual life. (Her name now appears in the calendar of the Church of England for June 15 as theologian and mystic.) Evelyn’s challenging letter of resignation was attached to the report, and can be read in the CFPSS reprint. But she was already on record for her opposition to Spiritualism, having contributed to a 1920 collection of views “ Spiritualism its present day meaning”. edited by Huntley Carter.

In response to a questionnaire sent to all contributors, Evelyn then wrote:

***Mysticism and Spiritualism***

*THE present revival of Spiritualism seems to me to demand no special explanation other than that provided by the law of supply and demand. Plainly, it is directly related to the widespread bereavements of the war, and represents one more effort of the human "psyche" to satisfy its own conscious or unconscious longings. The dramatic and creative powers of that "psyche," its almost unlimited capacity for self-deception, have been demonstrated in many psychological experiments, and are enough to account for a large proportion of the reported "communications." Thus the hand of the automatist surprises him by writing the message which he secretly longs to receive and this message often convinces him because (a) it is at his own mental level, and corresponds in general tenor with his unformulated demands, and (b) it frequently contains dream-elements of which he had not consciously thought, and which therefore seem to come from "the beyond." Though he may persuade his surface mind that he wants truth, the stronger self beneath wants hope and relief from pain, and will never allow him to investigate too closely the origin of its consolations.*

*Mediums, too, appear to be able thus to divine and respond to the instinctive wishes of those with whom they are en rapport. In the seance, where the individual wish-to-believe is reinforced by the heightened credulity and emotional tone of the crowd-spirit, the conditions for hallucination are so perfect that all phenomena produced under such conditions demand criticism of the most searching kind. Increased knowledge of human suggestibility obliges us to rule out many experiences reported in good faith, because it has been shown that psychologists can produce these experiences-which include the hearing of voices, the seeing of "materialized spirits" and levitation-in suggestible subjects.*

*I do not contend that the unconscious wish, automatism and human suggestibility account for all psychic phenomena. They do not. But when these possible causes have been eliminated, the number of well-attested facts that still seem to demand a "supernatural" explanation is much reduced. The whole subject is at present in confusion because those who are most deeply interested in Spiritualism seem unable to discriminate between the satisfaction of feeling and the quest of truth, and often resent the application of the ordinary laws of evidence to their reports. Our great need is for patient, honest and thoroughly disinterested investigators, free from any desire to prove or disprove personal survival, who will collect and criticize the mass of material now being produced; and isolate that small part of it which cannot be accounted for by the known laws of psychology. Such a study would certainly increase our knowledge-at present rudimentary-of the human self, and perhaps that of the universe in which we are placed.*

*From the point of view of a student of spiritual literature, one of the most remarkable and distressing characteristics of "Spiritualism" is the thoroughly unspiritual tone of its revelations. It fails to respond to the higher cravings of the soul, and never approaches the nobility and beauty of that conception of Eternal Life which has been developed by the mystics. To any one familiar with the Christian idea of the "beatific vision" of reality as the substance of our immortal life, even the least vulgar description of the future world which Spiritualism has to offer must seem like a bad dream. There is no need to insist on the materialistic absurdities which the authors of these "revelations" invite us to believe, or on the ingenuous way in which they disclose the earthly origin of their ideas. But there is need to insist on the fact that any*

*general acceptance of their pronouncements means a degeneration from that conception of Eternal Life which philosophy and religion have already achieved.*

*The opposition between the mystical and the " spiritualistic " view of reality is fundamental. It is significant that no mystic is ever found to concern himself with the problems of personal immortality; and none has brought back from his ecstatic ascents to that which Ruybroeck called the unwallied world of spirit any description of the " planes " and " spheres " of the spiritualist's universe. For the mystic, " God is the only reality, and we are real only in so far as we are in His order and He in us." Attaining to that realness he can afford to leave the rest, for he has transcended the world of mere duration and is already an inhabitant of eternity. But the " spiritualist " seems unable to conceive eternity. His immortality is a prolongation of time. It involves no achievement of being, no release from the stream of succession; it satisfies no teleological craving of the self. Yet it is just in this teleological craving, this instinct for a perfection of life which earthly conditions can never provide, that the most spiritual men have agreed to find the most powerful of arguments in favour of the survival of the soul.*

Moving on two decades, Evelyn was nevertheless invited to serve on the Lang committee. Geoffrey Curtis CR, an Anglican holy man, reviewing the Lang report in LIGHT after its official publication in 1979, observed:

*“ The chairman’s cousin, the gifted Evelyn Underhill, withdrew from the committee after its first meeting. (Kollar says second meeting- Ed. PP) Her letter of resignation which clearly influenced the minority, shows her in a somewhat Pharisaic phase from which she was soon to recover. In this mood of theological snobbery she finds the spiritualistic outlook hopelessly un-supernatural in character”. It is “ all about man, his survival, prospects, etc., hardly at all about God”*

*Surely our Lord took people as he found them. He did not tell the officer of Capernaum whose servant was sick, nor the woman of the region of Tyre and Sidon concerned for her ailing daughter, nor the penitent thief, that “ for **religion** survival only matters in so far as it is part of the Will of God.*

*Visiting her tomb in Hampstead on Easter Monday I could not help feeling that this dear child of God must have grown swiftly more human and compassionate towards the great variety of God’s other children she encounters in realms beyond this life.”*

In assessing the 1939 Report, Geoffrey suggests:

*“ The convictions of Spiritualists as expressed in the “ Seven Principles of Spiritualism “ evince a sense of responsibility and of the inexorable operation of divine justice with special awareness of the preeminence of love which ally them with the Torah and the Prophets of Israel rather than with the adherents of idolatry and the necromancers.” (See LIGHT Summer 1979 p.77-82.)*

***Those interested in EU are recommended to visit the site of the Evelyn Underhill Association, and to consult also the paper in their on line 2003 Newsletter about her attitude to magic [www.evelynunderhill.org](http://www.evelynunderhill.org)***

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## EMMA'S MUSICAL LIFE

In his 1997 occasional paper for Theosophical History "Astral Projection" Pat Deveney revealed that he had discovered Emma Hardinge presented conflicting accounts of her life. In particular, she claimed not to have experience of Spiritualism before she reached America. In a TH occasional paper "The Unseen Worlds" (2001) exclusively about Emma, Robert Mathiesen (RM) suggested that she worked as a medium for Dr Hardinge in London before going to America.

The biographical sketch which follows prefaces a work cited by RM, namely "Six Lectures" (1860.) It gives an impression of privileged life rather different from Bethnal Green as the Victorians knew it. It may be that Emma had difficulty devising a plausible account of her movements if she wished to keep secret her early work as a mesmeric subject.

I have been solicited, by the publisher of this work, to add some account of my own mediumship and connection with the great spiritualistic movement. Two reasons induce me to comply with this request as briefly as may be: the first is, the immense saving of time and breath which I am constantly called upon to bestow, for the satisfaction of inquirers who have never studied the homely proverb of "mind your own business;" and the next is, the saving of all manner of eccentric characters which divers persons, highly interested in minding my business, insist upon fastening on me, to the manifest injury of truth, and sometimes to my infinite bewilderment as to whether I am myself, or the apocryphal personage I sometimes hear spoken of as Emma Hardinge.

In brief, then, I was born in London, England, and up to the age of twelve years, was educated in the quiet seclusion of "sweet home." The death of a noble father, and the entire disruption of family ties, sent me out into the world at this early period of my life, first as a teacher of music in a school, and subsequently as a concert player and vocalist. I beg, distinctly, once and for all, to claim, that I never went to school in my life as a student; that the common branches of English education were received only in the family circle of accomplished English ladies, and the life page of good society; and that in no science but the theory of music, and the all-absorbing page of harmony and composition, did I ever receive any instruction! or pursue any study. From the age of twelve, my public life commenced; and anyone who has become acquainted with the severe studies which musical artistes are called upon to pursue in Europe, (especially when in addition, I had to provide a home for myself and my mother by my teaching, etc.) will scoff at the idea that any leisure could have been afforded me for those metaphysical and scientific studies in which certain of my American friends *confidently affirm* "my youth was absorbed."

With the exception of a little dabbling in astrology, pursued under the auspices of merry gipsying parties, I never heard of, much less studied, any "ology" in my life. From six to eight hours' practice of vocal and instrumental music each day, and the gay soirees in which musical artistes form the chief feature in European aristocratic circles, --thus passed my early life, until the complete loss of my singing voice, and chronic difficulties with my throat, compelled me to adopt speaking instead of singing for a profession, and the drama instead of the opera. From this period I remained in one London theatre for seven years, and except on rare occasions, never during that period passed more than a week at a time exempt from the arduous and all-engrossing duties of a London actress' life. To study original parts for a very fashionable and aristocratic theatre -- to compose the most recherche costumes --acquire all the accomplishments which entitle a successful London artiste to entree in the best society, --filled up my time to the fullest measure; and yet, from duties which

engrossed my companions too constantly to allow of the study of anything but the "role" of the night, I contrived to steal time to play the organ and piano, and give many compositions to the public. Messrs. Bookworms, who see only in books and a life of incessant study, the origin of my Lectures, this was my life up to the very hour when I set foot on the shores of America, in the year 1855. Be so good, all ye who peruse these pages, to shape your CONFIDENT assertions accordingly.

I came to America, purposing to pass six months, which the horrors of the Crimean war, then raging, made very sad and depressing in London, in a temporary engagement in New York. The six months extended to ten, and during that period, for the first time in my life, I heard of Spiritualism.

The idea of communion with "the dead" appeared, in the outset, impossible, then wicked, and nothing but the persuasions of several persons by whom I was surrounded, could have induced me to investigate. Purposing to return to England in a few weeks, however, and not unwilling to carry away with me subjects for sport and ridicule, (an inhospitable practice, too common among foreigners when visiting distant countries,) I determined to witness what I *knew* (as all *know* who really know nothing about Spiritualism,) was "a grand American humbug." Trusting to my shrewdness to detect what I felt *must* be a very shallow imposture, I visited Mr. Conklin, the well-known test medium in New York. Before I was introduced into the circle then assembled, I heard a sentence spelled out which appeared to me at variance with *Bible writ*. This was enough --after the fashion of some of those who attend our spiritual lectures, and with so little confidence in the truth of their own system, that the moment they hear it attacked, they rise up and fly, lest their truth and their religion should fly first --I fled, scared off, in fear that my "rock of ages," my Bible, should be insulted, and my own *unswerving faith* be shaken. by sitting in such infidel company. It was many weeks before I could bring myself to understand that *great truths are never in danger*, and that every blow leveled against a rock, must be made with stronger material than the rock, before it can touch it.

**We hope to reprint other accounts by Emma of her early life.**

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### **EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN : GRAVE NEWS**

Paul Gaunt has discovered the following account by "Two Worlds" editor Ernest Thompson in the issue of April 15 1950.

*Mrs E.H. Britten*

*I recently made a pilgrimage to the former residence of Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten, 'The Lindens', Humphrey Street, Cheetham Hill, Manchester. (First street on the right of Cheetham Hill Road after the Darlington Street bus stop.*

*As I entered Humphrey Street I noticed a local police station and to save time I made enquiries regarding the whereabouts of 'The Lindens'. Two sergeants and two constables had never heard of the house, and the reason was probably due to the fact that 'The Lindens', is now a grocer's warehouse! Actually the house is almost opposite the police station.*

*Large Enough for Meetings*

*I knocked on the door and it was some time before Mr. Cain, the new proprietor, opened it. I explained my mission and he was quite interested, not having heard of its history. It is a large, double fronted, bay windowed house, and each of the four front*

rooms are almost large enough to hold meetings in. The Lindens is engraved upon the large stone above the front door.

### *Empty for a Long Time*

*Mr. Cain kindly showed me round and explained how the house had been empty for a long period, and that he only paid £240 for it (£30 deposit)!*

*I was able to visualise in my I mind's eye what it must have looked like when Mrs. Britten lived there, and derived some pleasure from the visit, but was grieved to see rooms stacked high with boxes and cartons of various grocery commodities.*

*(See new Photograph of house on page 665). (not reproduced in PP.)*

### *Visit to grave*

*It was a cheerless, cloudy day when I visited Mrs. Britten's grave at the Manchester General Cemetery, Harpurhey. As one approaches the cemetery the foreboding and massive stone built entrance buildings remind one of the grim Victorian days when it was built. About 150 yards down the main pathway, on the right, lies Mrs. Britten's grave. On this side, some old houses appear beyond the cemetery wall and after crossing over about seven or eight graves her grave is approximately opposite the fourth house from the bottom of the row.*

*It is a very simple and bare looking grave (No. 2111), overgrown with balsam, and consists merely of a slab of stone on which are engraved the names of the five persons whose bodies were interred there.*

*They are Anne Sophia Floyd (93) d. March 31, 1886; William Britten (75) son in law of Mrs. A. S. Floyd, d. November 24, 1894; Emma Hardinge Britten (76) (wife of Wm. Britten) d. October 2, 1899; Gilbert Robinson Wilkinson (81) son in law of Mrs. A. S. Floyd, d. May 17, 1906. Margaret Floyd Wilkinson (82) d. October 24, 1912.*

See Photograph of gravestone on page 664. **(not reproduced in PP.)**

*The address of Margaret Floyd Wilkinson. at the time of her passing, according to the Registrar's record, was 1,087, Chester Road, Stretford.*

*The above information will no doubt be useful to those who wish to make a pilgrimage to these places, dear to many who cherish the memory of our beloved Emma Hardinge Britten, founder of the Spiritualists' National Union.*

*What about the Movement placing a suitable memorial over this grave? THE EDITOR.*

**It only remains for Psypioneer News to add the question – do the house and the grave still exist, a half century later?**

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### **NEW BOOK BY AUSTRALIAN HISTORIAN**

Dr Al Gabay of La Trobe University, Bendigo, who has written extensively on early Australian Spiritualism, has now produced “The Covert Enlightenment” (Swedenborg Foundation, 2004; available in UK from Swedenborg Society) which

argues that the writings of Swedenborg and Mesmer spread roots that influenced many popular movements in Europe and the United States. Gabay contends that the conjunction of two broad patterns – the new understanding of the power of the human mind and the interest in the supernatural – merged in the Spiritualist conception of the medium and the seance.

In an interview with the Fall/ Winter 2004 issue of LOGOS, the newsletter of the Swedenborg Foundation ([www.swedenborg.com](http://www.swedenborg.com)), Dr Gabay describes how Swedenborgians responded to early Spiritualism.

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### **DID LODGE ACCEPT REINCARNATION?**

Oliver Lodge was a psychic pioneer of the first rank. A distinguished physicist and radio explorer, he was an early SPR investigator of mediumship. He publicly expressed his conviction of spirit communication in “Survival of Man” (1909). All that he wrote on the paranormal is of value today.

Mrs Leonard is perhaps the medium about whose communications most books have been written. Near the beginning of her professional work, Lodge came to know her well because of messages from his son Raymond in the First World War. It was Mrs Piper, however, who had given him his most impressive evidence of identity twenty years before.

Charles Drayton Thomas, a Methodist minister, was also an early sitter of Mrs Leonard, wrote many books, and contributed to SPR Journal and Proceedings numerous papers on the mechanics of mediumship that repay careful study. It is perhaps not surprising that Oliver Lodge communicated to C.D. Thomas in 1944 at a sitting with Mrs Leonard. Normal evidential standards could not apply, because Mrs Leonard knew both Thomas and the Lodge family well, but the communication was nevertheless of great interest. It appeared in JSPR. June 1945 “A Discourse through Mrs Leonard and attributed to Sir Oliver Lodge” XXXIII p.134-156. It should be emphasised that Lodge did not control the medium; her guide Feda acted as intermediary. This paper caught the attention of Paul Beard, the leading Spiritualist thinker since the War, but otherwise has been neglected. JSPR itself was still a private publication at that time.

Lodge on earth had believed that that our personality was part of a wider self. Some other portion of the larger self could become incarnate later. But now Lodge as communicator went further. He affirmed reincarnation was true (“I have had many talks with my friend Myers about it.”).

The post-mortem Myers emphasised to him the educational value of earth life, the need for all round experience more than one life could give.

Mrs Leonard had come to believe that some persons were old souls and others not. Thomas himself was not greatly interested in the matter. But he noted:

*“ Reincarnation was rarely mentioned by my father in the earlier years of my sittings. He held that it certainly took place with some people, but he did not think actual proof was probable for us on earth. But in recent years he and two other regular communicators have spoken more freely about it, taking it for granted and occasionally touching on its implications. My father has also tried to make somewhat more clear to me what it is which can return to inhabit a physical body and again experience life on earth.” (p.154)*

Thomas was impressed by the style of the communication.

*“ It was as if the years had rolled back, and I was again hearing Sir Oliver broadcast, as he did on occasion not long before his death. Here, once more, was the deliberate, impressive manner: the distinctive vocalisation, the little pauses and repetitions; the sense of presence.... “*

A curious feature of the sitting was that a few words were also spoken in the air by direct voice, sometimes to correct what was relayed by Feda the medium’s control. An SPR attempt in 1933 to demonstrate that this voice was separate from the medium proved inconclusive. The full text of the address, with C.D. Thomas’s commentary, can be found on the SPR Proceedings and Journal database available to SPR members.

**If you would like to know more about Mrs Leonard a good starting point is Susy Smith’s book about her, which is on line at**

[www.enformy.com/LeonardTOC.htm](http://www.enformy.com/LeonardTOC.htm)

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