

# PSYPIONEER

Founded by Leslie Price

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PSYPIONEER NEWSLETTER

is now

# PSYPIONEER JOURNAL

Logo and heading designed  
by Jamie Gaunt

## **STANSTED DONATION - SPR AUDITOR DECLINES TO INVESTIGATE**

The SPR auditor has been asked by Leslie Price to examine the arrangements under which rare Spiritualist material donated to the Society was acquired by an SPR council member. The invitation was sent on 11 December. The auditor has long familiarity with SPR procedures.

However in his reply of 27 January, the auditor indicated that he did not consider it worth his detailed investigation.

*"Having discussed this matter with the Society's officers it is the general view that the transactions you mention were innocently made without intention to defraud the Society. The items were judged to have a limited market and were priced accordingly. Given the limited extent of the figures involved it is not felt, nor would Charity Commission or Companies Act guidelines require, that any adjustment to the accounting records should be made, as the sum is not a material amount."*

Historians would respond that the Victorian journals have a limited market in the same way that diamonds have a limited market - they are so expensive that few can aspire to buy them! The absolute determination of the SPR council member who purchased them, not to return them, leaves no doubt that some at least recognise their importance.

Meanwhile, on 27 December, a volume of "The Spiritualist" sold on eBay for just over £100. This low price was possibly due to the holidays, and contrasts with over £200 for the last volume of "Two Worlds" sold there.

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## **BEWITCHED BY THE DUNCAN MYTH**

There is considerable testimony that Mrs Duncan produced ectoplasmic phenomena, as we were reminded in the recent documentary *Unexplained* on UK's Channel 4, when Denise Iredell spoke. It is also reasonable to suppose that her arrest in 1944 was orchestrated by MI5. Dr Robert Hartley has deployed much evidence about this in his recent book<sup>1</sup>, starting with the diary of Guy Liddell which recorded that the MI5 effort began in December 1941, just after the Barham seance.

Thus some revision of the 1944 trial verdict ought not to be impossible. The progress of the Shot at Dawn campaign, which is concerned with First World War events, shows how

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<sup>1</sup> See: - Books for sale in this issue' *Helen Duncan - The Mystery Show Trial* .

even distant verdicts can be officially reconsidered. But there are a number of problems with the HD pardon campaign. It has not received much backing or leadership from the official Spiritualist bodies, and it has associated itself with historically dubious side issues.

This can be seen from the web site<sup>2</sup> which claims to be the official pardon site, and which plays up a link with Winston Churchill which is undocumented, except for one well-known query he wrote about the cost of the 1944 trial. One might have hoped that new evidence would emerge from a book<sup>3</sup> by Michael Colmer, who has researched the case for ten years, but this is not the case.

Colmer claims “His personal notes of appreciation along with other similar memorabilia were destroyed in a house fire at the Duncan family home...” (p.38).

This is the first claim I have seen of such notes. On the same page Colmer states “it is more than just probable that Churchill knew of Helen Duncan and her work.” But such notes if they ever existed would have left no doubt that he did.

Another opportunity to substantiate the claim is lost in relation to Mrs Duncan’s time in Holloway Prison. “And many senior Spiritualists who were close to Helen report that it was not only prisoners and staff who made pilgrimage to the dread Holloway Gaol. .So too did some of her other more notable sitters, including Britain’s Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill himself.” (p.87).

But who are these senior Spiritualists? Clearly they did not include, for example, Maurice Barbanell or Percy Wilson, who really were senior Spiritualists and actually knew Mrs Duncan very well. And indeed, Mrs Duncan’s daughter knew nothing of any Churchill connection. She was proud of her mother’s work, wrote a book about it, but said nothing about Churchill. Could this be because the Churchill tradition is a more recent development, in response to the present campaign?

Some other historical statements in the book do not give confidence. Mrs Duncan, we are told, was at one point threatened with a charge of Conspiracy “which, in wartime Britain, carried the ultimate sentence of death by hanging.” (p.84). Actually the charge considered was conspiracy to defraud, which was not a capital crime.

Later events are also unclear. (p.131) “Spiritualism’s governing National Union actually withdrew her diploma at one stage”, but did they ever restore it? The story of the SNU and Mrs Duncan has yet to be fully told.

“Helen’s family and many Spiritualist friends say that during his visits to her cell Prime Minister Churchill made promises of making amends to Helen. It is a fact that in 1951 the

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2 See: -Official pardon site for Helen Duncan: - [www.helenduncan.org.uk](http://www.helenduncan.org.uk)

3 Book by Michael Colmer: - <http://www.churchillswitch.com/>.

damning 1735 Witchcraft Act which had been used to imprison Helen was finally repealed.”

Who are these unnamed friends who said nothing for so many years? There is no evidence that Churchill played any part in the campaign to change the law, which succeeded in 1951, before he returned to power.

We are also told that “some four years later in 1954 Spiritualism was officially recognized as a proper religion by formal Act of Parliament.” As previously noted in *Psypioneer* June 2006, we have not been able to identify what Act is referred to in what seems to be a Net myth.

The self-proclaimed official HD campaign then has not brought forth the new data which are desired. Once more, a better line might be found in Robert Hartley’s book. He was the first to draw attention to the diary entry of Guy Liddell in 1941 that MI5 after the Barham séance was beginning an investigation of Mrs Duncan. The files of that investigation, which probably continued until she was jailed, and included the planting of an agent in her circle, may explain what really happened.

LP.

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## HELEN DUNCAN

1897 – 1956

### **Introductory Note by Psypioneer: -**

Roy Stemman in his, *Paranormal Review* <sup>4</sup> reported on the T.V documentary “Tony Robinson and the Blitz Witch” which was screened on Channel 4, 29<sup>th</sup> December 2008. Roy referred to some quotes which were used in a letter that I sent to *Psychic News*, and published in P.N., 24 February, 2007.

These quotes were primarily referring to the sinking of the H.M.S. *Barham* in 1941; these were taken from a lecture given in November 1958 by former S.N.U., president (1950 – 1953)<sup>5</sup> Percy Wilson, M.A.

Below is published in full, what Percy Wilson said in his address about the medium Helen Duncan, followed by a discussion on his lecture. This lecture was part of a conference organised by the College of Psychic Science at Brighton on November

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<sup>4</sup> <http://paranormalreview.co.uk/RoysBlog/tabid/127/EntryID/14/Default.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> The story was covered in P.N, issue January 17<sup>th</sup> 2009 which stated that Percy Wilson was S.N.U., president in 1958. But the S.N.U., president in 1958 was Charles Quastel according to the S.N.U. diary.

28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> 1958: - “The Problem of Survival”; principal speakers were Brigadier R.C. Firebrace, Percy Wilson and Professor H.H. Price<sup>6</sup>.

Taken from *Light* vol. LXXIX No. 3438 - Spring, 1959.

## EVIDENCE FOR SURVIVAL

### The Historical Significance of Physical Mediumship

By Percy Wilson, M.A.

The next case I wish to draw your attention to is one within my own experience: there are many more but I think it is time to reveal some of the things of this particular experience, relating to Helen Duncan's mediumship, during the last war, and leading up to her trial. The story so far as I am concerned began with an invitation to me to have lunch with Maurice Barbanell. During that lunch he asked me if I had heard what had happened at a Helen Duncan seance at Portsmouth the previous evening. He told me that he had had a message that morning to say that at this seance a figure had appeared of a sailor with a capband H.M.S. *Barham*; and the information was given that the *Barham* had been sunk in the Mediterranean but that the fact was not to be announced for three months because of the political and military situation. I went back to my office. I was then what you might call a senior official of the Ministry of War Transport. I was in a detached building, Devonshire House, whereas the main office was in Berkeley Square House; so I deliberately went along to Berkeley Square House to ask some of my senior colleagues and remember, the Ministry of Shipping was part of the Ministry of War Transport whether they had heard of the sinking of the *Barham* in the Mediterranean. No one had heard, but one of them said he would make an enquiry; and he told me later that afternoon that it was not known in the Ministry of War Transport. That was on the day after the message had been given in Portsmouth.

Well you will find, as I found, that in fact the news of the sinking of the *Barham* was only released three months later and the explanation was given that it was not in the public interest to reveal the fact at the time. You can imagine the consternation and feeling in Portsmouth when this piece of rather colourful information had appeared at a seance with Helen Duncan. In passing I would have you observe that although this was a physical seance, it contained evidence at the same time, rather straight evidence, of the survival of the particular boy who came back to speak to his mother.

Nothing further happened until, I think it was about a year later, Mrs. Duncan paid another visit to Portsmouth, and gave another seance. In the course of that she was seized, and a white sheet, so called, was seized but was never heard of afterwards; and then the prosecution under the Witchcraft Act of 1735 began. The defence under that Act was really conducted from my house, where Mr. MacIndoe stayed with me.

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<sup>6</sup> Wykeham Professor of Logic, Oxford

At the beginning of the trial I got a message from two of my sons, who were then undergraduates in Oxford, and had visited the Cowley Spiritualist church. There they met a man called Spencer who asserted that at the Cowley Works of Morris Motors in the previous year a young man had made a bet that the next time Mrs. Duncan appeared at Portsmouth she would be arrested. That bet was taken, the side stakes were given to a third party, and when Mrs. Duncan was arrested the bet was paid. It transpired that the principal witness on behalf of the police against Mrs. Duncan was the uncle of the man who had made the bet.

I immediately saw the value of this testimony and with a lot of last-minute effort we managed to get Mr. Spencer up to the Old Bailey during the trial; but for some reason he was not called as a witness. I would ask you, however, if you ever read the record of the trial, to look at the concluding remarks, after the conviction, of the Chief Constable of Portsmouth, which seem to me to shed a lurid light on the circumstances of that trial. The only conclusion I can come to is that the police and the naval authorities did not want Mrs. Duncan about in Portsmouth before D-Day or during D-Day.

### **Séance During Trial**

During the trial one of my sons, Geoffrey, acted in the court as a messenger for the defence, and when it was half-way through, after prosecution evidence had been given, we arranged (it was a Friday afternoon) that he should collect Mrs. Duncan straight from the court at four o'clock, take her to Holborn Viaduct station, bring her through to Wimbledon and then by taxi on to my house. This he duly did. She had had no opportunity of going anywhere else from the court on the way. And I had my usual home circle gathered there. So, we gave Mrs. Duncan a good tea, I don't advocate this before a physical circle, but there was a reason for it on this occasion because we included some really good red jam in it, thanks to the regurgitation theory of Harry Price. Shortly afterwards, we went upstairs to my own seance room and held a seance. I was seated next to the curtains of the cabinet, and there was a red light behind me on the ceiling. (I could not see it but it was shining behind me, so that my eyes were not inhibited by it.) In the course of the seance Mrs. Duncan stood up and ectoplasm poured in streams, in ribbons, from her nose and her mouth, on to her massive bosom, curled up in a ribbon on her bosom, and dropped to the ground; and then, as she was standing with her arms akimbo, I suddenly saw it leap up two ways to her hands. I was within a yard of her with a light above my head and I saw everything that happened. Shortly afterwards the whole mass of ectoplasm disappeared in an instant. I could not tell you when: it was there and then it was not. It just disappeared.

Now that evidence was sufficient for us to conclude that it was safe, even in the hard circumstances of the court at the Old Bailey, for Mr. Loseby to offer the judge and jury a personal demonstration when he opened his evidence for the defence. That offer, as you will remember, was refused.

Those are the circumstances which I want to put on record now, relating to the Helen Duncan prosecution. I think they tell a story of their own, and I need not dot the i's or cross the t's.

Now these testimonies, all that I have quoted, are so positive that I suggest that only three conclusions are possible. (a) The facts are substantially as I have related them, or were related by the witnesses, or (b) the people testifying were unworthy of credence, which is precisely the criterion, I may remark, which Professor Sidgwick himself, in his first presidential lecture to the S.P.R. on its foundation, had postulated as being one of the desirable positions to get into. Here are his words: "We must drive the objector into the position of being forced either to admit the phenomena as inexplicable, at least to him, or to accuse the investigators either of lying or creating, or of a blindness or forgetfulness incompatible with any intellectual condition except absolute idiocy".

Or (c) that the people who deny the testimonies are like the Irishman who was brought before a judge on a charge of stealing a kettle. Three witnesses gave full personal testimony that they had seen him steal the kettle; whereupon he said to the judge, "Surely, Your Honour, you are not going to convict me on the evidence of three witnesses? I can produce fifty who did not see me steal that kettle!"

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Following the Lecture by Mr. Percy Wilson**

**Mr. Lucian Landau:** Now I would like to turn to Mrs. Duncan as I had a certain experience with that lady. To start with I think that Mr. Wilson made a mistake in giving her red jam for tea and then having a red light in his seance room. It would have been better to have given her some bright green jam! However, I have sat with Mrs. Duncan in groups on a number of occasions and witnessed numerous phenomena which I regarded as extremely uninteresting. Generally speaking, all I could see was Mrs. Duncan covered with something or other that was very difficult to identify, and I thought little of it. On one occasion, however, when I was beginning to get bored, the control, whoever that might have been, called on me and asked me to step forward, which I did. The curtain was drawn by something and a figure stepped out. The figure was much smaller than Mrs. Duncan and much thinner and it had the face of my mother. For the first time since I was two years old I found myself speechless.

As far as I was concerned there was absolutely no doubt about it; my mother had been dead then for only about six months and she looked exactly as she did before her last illness. She looked at me; I suppose she expected me to say something, but as I said, I couldn't do it: she didn't say anything but nodded in a very characteristic way. The experience is really quite uncommunicable but yet, to me, it was highly significant. A moment later she disappeared. She sank into the floor, as it were. The light was quite good and there could have been no doubt about it. I discussed this occurrence with Dr. Dingwall fairly recently and he said "Ah! that was your mind's eye that saw it". Now I am fairly well acquainted with my mind's eye and I don't believe it was that.

**Brigadier Firebrace:** Just a little addition to Mrs. Duncan's story of sunken ships. During the war I was head of Intelligence in Scotland and I had the opportunity of attending a seance with Mrs. Duncan in Edinburgh. There appeared during the seance the form of a control, Albert, and he suddenly said "a great British battleship has just been sunk". Well, I had no knowledge of this. After the seance I returned to my headquarters and as soon as I got back, about two hours after the sitting, I heard on the private line from the Admiralty in Scotland the news that the Hood had been sunk. And I was then able to check up that at the time of the seance the Admiralty had no knowledge whatever of the sinking of the ship. That was an instance of a materialised form, whatever you like to call it, which did give, I think at the correct time, the fact about the sinking of the battleship. So you understand from the point of view of the authorities, Mrs. Duncan was a somewhat dangerous person. It is a fact that the police from Scotland Yard did come to the International Institute while these stories were current, and consulted Mrs. Duncan there, and myself, as to how Mrs. Duncan could be prevented from giving this information out, because the authorities admitted that the information was authentic.

**Mrs. K. M. Goldney:** I don't want to make this remark appear facetious, but if the control, Albert, was able, by means of clairvoyance, to find out about the sinking of the ship he might also have known that it was extremely dangerous to read the minds, presumably of British Intelligence and it would really have been a very big disadvantage to the British side. They had that knowledge made perfect and I don't know whether one would presume he was on the side of the Germans when he gave out it had been sunk.

**Brigadier Firebrace:** Well, I don't know why you should assume that anybody on the other side should favour British Intelligence or German Intelligence. All I am trying to establish is that there is very little difference.

I should like to refer very shortly to this question of Albert. Now I can't think that the mere fact of dying confers wisdom on a person who had none before and I would suggest that Albert in life, if he ever was in life, was probably a loose-talker, and when he returned through Mrs. Duncan he still remained a loose-talker. You know the tendency, in all of us, if you have some information that other people have not, it's a very great temptation to pass it on. I do not think the mere fact of dying actually had changed Albert.

**Mrs. K. M. Goldney:** Anyone who has read Harry Price's book on the investigation of Mrs. Duncan, will know that at that time I was on the staff of Queen Charlotte's and he asked me whether I would come to give a medical examination of Mrs. Duncan. As a result of that I and William McDougall, who was also present at all these examinations, as well as Dr. William Brown, confirmed that no medical examination explained the presence of ectoplasm or material or whatever you like to call it. But following it, there were several letters written to me on the view that no medical examination had been given at all and because of that I think it would be fair to put on record that I asked the medium whether she wished to have the examination take place and she said yes, she did. So far as the examination was concerned it was

entirely in her favour insofar as no medical examination could account for the material.

**Mr. Harold Vigurs:** I was associated then of course not only with the L.S.A. but also with the Society at Croydon and Mrs. Duncan was a member of that Society at Croydon. It had quite a number of remarkable sittings with her there. I was with Mrs. Duncan when Miss Phillimore and I think, I'm speaking from memory now, it was Captain Miller, came down to see Mrs. Duncan to terminate the arrangements that they had made. Apparently on the recommendation of Dr. Ross, Mrs. Duncan was invited down to the L.S.A. for a series of experiments and naturally certain conditions were laid down as to her services. I am sorry to say that Mrs. Duncan quite blatantly broke those conditions. Why she ever went to Harry Price at all I do not know. It was a breach of faith so far as the L.S.A. was concerned and I think it was primarily due to the fact, not that her mediumship was so much questioned, but her reliability as a party to a contractual obligation was so doubtful, that the L.S.A. decided to terminate the whole arrangement.

**Mrs. Goldney:** There were also facts of doubting the mediumship, weren't there? It was never made public and I think it's rather a pity that it was not.

**Mr. Harold Vigurs:** There were times when the mediumship was beyond peradventure; the conditions were such that it carried the whole imprint of its own genuineness. But undoubtedly at other times the mind of the sensitive interferes with the production of the phenomena and it requires a very sympathetic and far-seeing researcher to co-operate with the medium. Well I am afraid with all physical mediumship at times you do get those periods when you have to put it down to the interference of the personality or mind of the actual sensitive. But if you are far-seeing enough you will continue with your efforts, because you know that you will obtain results which seem to indicate otherwise.

**Mr. Wilson:** Arising out of a remark made Mrs. Goldney I would like to say that I am very strongly opposed to publication of negative results of investigation. You will find that in every branch of science, as far as I know, you use your negative results to direct you to positive. Unless there is some positive thing in negative research which can direct future research, then it is simply cluttering up scientific literature to publish it. It is very important in scientific research that your negative results should be discarded, except insofar as they direct the lines of future research. It is the positive that counts and never the negative. In other words, the Irishman cannot bring forward his fifty witnesses.

**Mr. Maurice Barbanell:** I have had a great deal of experience with Mrs. Duncan and when Harry Price first advocated the extraordinary theory of regurgitation we tested her out very simply by getting her and every member of the seance to swallow methylin blue pastels, which dyed the contents of everybody's stomach blue. The ectoplasm that emerged was definitely white. Then on numerous occasions I was asked to feel the ectoplasm, to handle it, and it was bone-dry. No liquid of any kind and not even dampness. My most extraordinary experience with Helen Duncan was (I

think this is unique, I don't know anybody else who has had it) being invited into the cabinet with her and to watch the whole process of materialisation taking place from scratch. I saw the ectoplasm extruding from her ears, her mouth, her nostrils and gradually billowing and forming the shape, six feet high, of the guide who called himself Albert, and then watched him slowly sink and disappear into the ground. Now I think one other fact ought to be mentioned in connection with the prosecution of Helen Duncan which started at Portsmouth; it may be unimportant, and it may be completely coincidental but it is that the Chief Constable at Portsmouth at the time was a Roman Catholic.

**Dr. Chisholm:** First of all I should like to ask Mr. Barbanell whether any of the people at the seances were doctors. Secondly I would like to ask him what sort of capsules were swallowed, because methylin blue capsules quite frequently pass through the stomach without absorption. Thirdly I would like to ask our speaker, first of all with regard to the disturbance in light that Dr. Land carried out, was there any question of polarised light? And in either the white light or the red light, and secondly why is it that all the material referred to is historical? I note the paper was on historical study of difficult phenomena, but in view of the fact that in those days there was neither the electronic developments that have happened since, nor the study of the unconscious which has been made since most of these papers were written; why is it that more recent phenomena are not put forward as evidence?

**Mr. Maurice Barbanell:** I'll answer your methylin blue question very simply by telling you that the capsules were prepared by a doctor friend of mine, Dr. Margaret Vivian, of Southport; they were effective and didn't pass right through the stomach as you suggest and as this is a scientific gathering I will tell you how we proved it. Because an hour later when we passed water it was blue. This was suggested by a doctor as being the perfect test.

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## DUNCAN MEMOIR REPRINTED

We are pleased to note that Gena Brealey's book about her mother "The Two Worlds of Helen Duncan" has been reprinted<sup>7</sup> on the initiative of Ann Harrison.

Some minor changes have been made to clarify the events leading to the 1944 arrest; and a future reprint will adopt the generally accepted birth date of 1897 rather than 1895. There are hopes that further material by Gena may be published soon; a longer manuscript was used by Malcolm Gaskill in his biography.

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<sup>7</sup> Available from Psychic News: - <http://www.psychicnewsbookshop.co.uk/product/571> also from Ann Harrison: - [snppbooks@gmail.com](mailto:snppbooks@gmail.com)

Paul Gaunt, who knew Gena, recalls: -

Gena and her husband George were popular platform workers in Christian, and SNU Spiritualist churches in the 1970's. George who worked on the railways often acted as demonstrator with Gena giving the address. Gena was herself a mental medium and well known as a demonstrator.

They were involved in a small Spiritualist church, which was a converted house, in Leagrave Luton, Bedfordshire for some years. In the early 1980's they moved to Stoke-on Trent Staffordshire; at the age of 60 Gena had a heart attack and she died in 1986, just months after the publication of 'The Two Worlds of Helen Duncan'

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## CONAN DOYLE BIOGRAPHY RECONSIDERED



### **Introductory Note by Pyspioneer: -**

We called attention to Andrew Lycett's new biography of Arthur Conan Doyle in September 2007. The book is now available in paperback, and Garth Willey offers a deeper examination.

**CONAN DOYLE: THE MAN WHO CREATED SHERLOCK HOLMES (2007) by Andrew Lycett. Phoenix paperback edition, London (2008) xv + 554 pp. £10.99 ISBN: 978-0-7538-2428-3**

### **By way of Introduction**

Professional biographer Andrew Lycett's 2007 work was the latest in a long line of biographies of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (ACD). Indeed, the list extends towards 30 such publications over nearly 80 years since he died (was "Promoted!" as the heading in *Two Worlds* exclaimed on 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1930). There are 23 major biographical items listed through to year 2000 on the Arthur Conan Doyle Society's website, about which time the Society went into recess (unfortunately, and pending willing successor volunteers) but details are still to be found (by a circuitous route) at [www.ash-tree.bc.ca](http://www.ash-tree.bc.ca) (and enter via the Arthur Conan Doyle Society link). In addition, there was ACD's own autobiography *Memories and Adventures* and other semi-autobiographical works; the Journal of the ACD Society's extensive biographical material; and a "Further Reading" list to be found on the aforementioned website.

In recent years successive events have given rise to a great wealth of new information on the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. ACD's literary estate and personal papers had been the subject of ongoing legal wrangling between his heirs and successors, and between them and third party publishers and reproducers of ACD's literary works. A substantial resolution and distribution was achieved during the 1990s. This resolution eventuated in much of his daughter's (Dame Jean Conan Doyle, 1912-1997) share, along with much of Dame Jean's own collection of letters and papers, being directed to the British Library in 2004. The shares of the estates of the two deceased daughters-in-law (Anna - widow of Adrian and Princess Nina – widow of Denis) then came on the market to be auctioned off at Christie's, London, on 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2004 – certain items being purchased by the British Library.

But getting the collection to auction had not been easy. Nina's estate had passed to a USA based Mdivani (Georgian royal family) relative who then died intestate, no doubt generating its own complications and financial benefits to the legal fraternity! Years earlier, Nina had negotiated with her sisters-in-law to take the literary rights of the Conan Doyle estate, in addition to retaining a share in the unpublished personal papers. She then sold the literary rights in 1977 to a wealthy Hungarian woman, Andrea Reynolds, who still markets her Sherlock Holmes rights; but is frequently taken to court by the Conan Doyle estate for infringements. Meantime, at some stage, Nina's interest in the family unpublished personal papers had passed over to Anna, or to Anna's estate.

In addition, there was a storehouse of letters, diaries, photos and papers from the estate of John Doyle (son of ACD's brother Innes) which his widow, Georgina, drew on to publish *Out of the Shadows: The Untold Story of Arthur Conan Doyle's First Family* in 2004. This focuses on ACD's first marriage to Louise (Touie) and on his relationship with his first two children, Mary and Kingsley. A review of it, *New Light on Arthur Conan Doyle* by Roger Straughan, is to be found in *Psypioneer* Vol. 1, No 8, December

2004 at [www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP8](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP8) ; and other comments are to be found on the ACD Society web pages referred to above under the link 'News'.

And in 2007, a couple of months after Lycett's *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes*, the actual letters to which Lycett had had access (plus some which had been withheld from him) were published as *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, edited and annotated by Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower (both former biographers of ACD) and Charles Foley (a great nephew of Sir Arthur and now an executor of both the Conan Doyle estate and Dame Jean's estate). Collectively, the letters formed from part of the collection which Dame Jean left to the British Library. To quote from the editors' Introduction:

... Conan Doyle was a tireless correspondent, and few writers have left as full or vivid a record of their life and literary work. While he wrote hundreds of letters to the press and professional associates, the many he wrote to his mother were far more personal and introspective in nature, revealing a side of the man not previously known.

... The correspondence constitutes a far more candid autobiography than the one that Conan Doyle actually published in the 1920s – called *Memories and Adventures* – which was long on adventures but deliberately short on the memories.

Virtually no aspect of Conan Doyle's life and work goes unmentioned in these letters, and they depict his personality and life far more completely and candidly than any previous treatment. They also contain many discoveries that greatly extend and often contradict the existing knowledge of his life. (p4)

*A Life in Letters* is a substantial work of 710 pages. It presents about 1,000 of the letters which ACD wrote to his mother, Mary, up until her death in 1920, complemented by others to his father, brother and sisters and other figures in his life which the editors arranged and annotated to provide his "life in letters."

Lycett's access to these letters had been somewhat frustratingly restricted by the Trustees who had discretionary power under Dame Jean's will to suppress publication of documents merely of family interest – a tally of some 75 to 100 letters. Lycett also expresses the view that many letters to, and/or concerning, ACD's first wife, Louise, had been 'weeded out' (presumably destroyed) by Lady Conan Doyle and her sons following ACD's death. (p.111)

Other material which was not available or not used for the foregoing works but which Andrew Lycett gained late access to, was the collection of Richard Lancelyn Green (RLG). On 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2004, in the lead up to the Christie's auction, the world's top Doyle/Holmes expert, RLG, aged 50, died in London: and his massive collection of Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes material, estimated to be worth about 2 million pounds, was left to the Portsmouth City Council (ACD had lived there for 8½ years as a GP, 1882-1890).

Lycett provides a most interesting 11 page *Afterword* detailing the intriguing problems which beset the Conan Doyle estate for 75 years. The saga reads like a plot reminiscent of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*! Round the globe mystery and intrigue, family feuds, a Georgian princess, playboy heirs with Ferraris and mistresses, solicitors' vaults, a Swiss Chateau, an Isle of Man tax shelter, missing papers and, ultimately, the death of RLG by garrotting! Yes, indeed. ACD often used his own experiences as the basis for his novels but what was to follow his death must have caused his etheric writing hand to itch!

Lycett tactfully notes that he attended RLG's inquest and writes that, although *the coroner recorded an open verdict... I have little doubt that... Green took his own life.* (p464) More directly, *The Sunday Telegraph* reported that RLG *was dead in his bed... garrotted with a shoelace tightened by a wooden spoon:* that the only reasonable doubt, excluding murder, was whether he had done it as a means of suicide or *in a fetishistic sexual act that accidentally led to his death.* However, suicide was highly probable due to his recent behaviour and highly distraught frame of mind at the thought of the Christie's auction eventuating in such valuable ACD records being dispersed far and wide – whereas he thought they had been intended to go into the British Library collection. (*Good Weekend*, July 24, 2004, Australia – from an edited version of an article originally published in *The Sunday Telegraph Magazine* – date not given.)

And even as this Review of Lycett's work is being finalised, yet another biography has appeared: *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* by Russell Miller. This book is divided into three sections – (1) The Doctor (2) The Writer and (3) The Spiritualist; and in a synopsis the Random House Group (<http://www.rbooks.co.uk/product.aspx?id=0436206137>) states:

During his lifetime Conan Doyle wrote more than 1,500 letters to members of his family, most notably his mother, revealing his innermost thoughts, fears and hopes: Russell Miller is the first biographer to have been granted unlimited access to Conan Doyle's private correspondence. *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle* also makes use of the writer's personal papers, unseen for many years, and is the first book to draw fully on the Richard Lancelyn Green archive, the world's most comprehensive collection of Conan Doyle material.

Some or all of the material at the British Library denied to Lycett by the Trustees of Dame Jean's will was subsequently available to Miller via *A Life in Letters*; and possibly there was other material released by the Trustees as well.

Finally in this introductory note, and before proceeding to the Review, it is worth noting that although ACD had five children from his two marriages, his lineage ended there: none of the five produced offspring. Hence the prominent roles of his in-laws and distant relatives in the affairs of his estate.

## Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes

As a Doylean I must begin by expressing umbrage at professional biographer Andrew Lycett's familiarity in referring to ACD throughout as 'Arthur'. Perhaps the family letters and diaries led Lycett to think of him as 'Arthur', but a point made by ACD's son, Adrian Conan Doyle, in *The True Conan Doyle* (1945) was that:

... there were few things that could stir Conan Doyle more swiftly to a roar of Celtic rage than the clap on the back, the uninvited use of his Christian name or the presumptuous observation. (p13)

Even ACD's friend and first biographer, the Rev John Lamond, in *Arthur Conan Doyle, A Memoir* (1931), referred to him as 'Sir Arthur' or as 'Conan Doyle' according to context – and briefly as 'young Arthur' as a boy and 'Dr Doyle' as a physician, but never as 'Arthur'; and, in the *Memoir's* supplement, *Lady Conan Doyle's Tribute*, Lady Conan Doyle invariably refers to him as 'my husband'. Owen Dudley Edwards (ODE), of the same kith as ACD being an Irish born resident of Edinburgh and employed as an Honorary Fellow at ACD's University of Edinburgh and Honorary member of the ACD Society, wrote *The Quest for Sherlock Holmes*, 1983 (and I fondly remember ODE taking the participants in an ACD Society 'Back to Edinburgh Weekend' in 1993 on a half day tour around the homes ACD had lived in, to the RC church where we could inspect ACD's baptismal record, and to Holyrood Palace where ACD's father had worked). In *The Quest*, ODE generally refers to ACD as 'Conan Doyle' but occasionally as 'Arthur' or as 'ACD' where a note of affection or familiarity is apparent. Otherwise, all biographers to my knowledge (and I have most of them) refer to him as 'Conan Doyle' or 'Doyle,' unless the context begs otherwise. And, as may be gathered from my usage, Doyleans generally refer to him as 'ACD' (whereas, on a lighter note, Sherlockians and Holmesians refer to him as Dr Watson's literary agent!). It was pleasing, however, to find that Lycett had utilised the functional 'ACD' in the copious and most welcome 40 pages of *Notes* of his sources.

Moving on! Overall, Andrew Lycett has masterfully tracked his subject's life path through his letters and diaries; he has 'got inside the man' and presented a comprehensive study of ACD's motivations in relation to his family lineage and his upbringing – such as the influences of his father's alcoholism - and to all the contemporary events and conditions throughout ACD's life: in politics, world affairs, business, the Arts, sport, religion and the progress of science and materialism. In particular, Lycett has drawn attention throughout to ACD's absorbing and passionate interest in the historical, philosophical and scientific bases of religion and the paranormal. Initially this provided good material for many of his novels and short stories; but, beyond the normal level of intellectual curiosity, ACD had a deeper fascination for an understanding of the human soul itself, man's destiny after physical death and the effect of man's earth life on the soul – consistent with Frederic Myers's deliberations in *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. Especially, Lycett weaves his biography with an eye to the emergence later in ACD's life of his dominant focus on "the vital message" of spiritualism. [*The Vital Message* having been the title of the second of ACD's spiritualist

books; the 'vital message' being the message behind a message received via mediumship: that there is life after death.]

Access to the family diaries and correspondences enormously opened up ACD's personal life to Lycett – far and beyond what had previously been transparent. That ACD's widow and descendants and representatives 'weeded out' the archives, as Lycett alleges, is greatly bemoaned: not only for the absence of the truth of more intimate matters but because it left Lycett the task of interpreting what he thought was the truth. Inevitably, the writer's fertile mind and desire to add flare must tend to the spicier alternatives.

I'm referring here specifically to two matters: his mother's relationship with Dr Bryan Waller (a man 16 or 17 years her junior); and ACD's 10 year relationship with Jean Leckie (a young lady 15 years his junior) while his first wife, Louise (Touie), was terminally ill with tuberculosis. In both situations, Lycett deliberately leads his reader to the belief that these relationships extended to extra-marital sex. In both situations it is impossible without specific – rather than circumstantial – evidence to resolve that they were, or were not, limited to platonic friendships.

And yet, Lycett very quickly disregards specific evidences of psi phenomena and personal evidences of survival after death – which are abundant.

Lycett certainly leads his readers. For example, when writing about ACD's early days as a general practitioner: ... *his youthful zeal or obsessive behaviour (depending on one's point of view)*... (p.90) changes to ... *Arthur's current obsessions*... (p.99). And again, when relating how he discussed with his brother, Innes, his relationship with Jean, Lycett writes: *It... appears to be an admission that he enjoyed sexual relations with Jean, but as he denied this elsewhere, it is impossible to confirm.* (p.259) Six pages later, Lycett, in reference to ACD's departure for the Boer War, blatantly writes that: *She (Jean)... had come, unannounced and alone, to wish her lover God-speed.* (p.265)

However, another aspect of ACD's personal life which I feel Lycett treats much more equitably is ACD's relationship with the two children, Mary and Kingsley, from his first marriage: certainly far more so than is portrayed in Georgina Doyle's *Out of the Shadows*. Here, Lycett gives readers a very fair insight into the atmosphere which developed between the two children and their father: the circumstances of his very active life during their childhood, their mother's physical infirmities, and Mary's strong-mindedness and garrulous nature. Mary was a child of the suffragette age – but just how militant she became in her 20's is unclear. She worked with her father in the Psychic Bookshop in the 1920's and was a spiritualist - but argued with him over many aspects of it. She died a spinster in 1976, aged 87; and Kingsley died of pneumonia following the Great War. Undoubtedly, there were problems, and ACD must accept responsibility as the father – but there are many factors involved.

In similar vein, Lycett deals with ACD's performance as a father to his two sons and a daughter by Jean (Denis, Adrian and Jean) in a very open and candid manner: by all

accounts, they were thoroughly spoilt. Thus the two boys ended up as wastrel playboys, whilst, fortunately, Jean managed to rise above it all and pursued a very productive life, eventually earning her own title and honours: Air Commandant Dame Jean Lena Annette Doyle - for her role in intelligence in the WRAF during World War II.

However Lycett is far from sympathetic to, or understanding of, ACD's spiritualistic beliefs. Although he endeavours not to openly demean ACD's well known reputation for being 'obsessed' with spiritualist philosophy, Lycett's sceptical views of mediumship are well exhibited on pages 132 & 134:-

- The Fox sisters claimed to be able to get in touch with the spirits of the dead...
- Such mediums devised other means of contacting spirits...
- ...they also found ways of materialising these spirits... and of further demonstrating their powers through feats such as levitation.
- Daniel Dunglas Hume was a prime exponent of all these manifestations of mind over matter.
- ...the early days... when the Fox sisters had not been exposed as frauds...

Whether Lycett thoroughly investigated mental and physical phenomena and well evidenced aspects of the paranormal such as telepathy, precognition and psychokinesis is a moot point. Whilst Lycett's grasp of contemporary affairs in the field of the Arts, politics, etc is well demonstrated, the depth of his researches into paranormal phenomena - beyond its applications in plots for story telling - is certainly questionable: I do believe that ACD would have had him on toast for being an uninformed sceptic!

ACD's mother died late in 1920 (while he was on his Australia and New Zealand tour) and so Lycett's trail of letters to his closest confidant ceased to exist for the last decade of ACD's intensive life - i.e. for the period of ACD's greatest involvement with spiritualism and psychic research. And so Lycett's drive to 'get inside the man' should have demanded more rigorous and extensive research into spiritualism and into the spiritualist mediums he disparagingly refers to.

On page 92, Lycett introduces the SPR:

At the start of [1882] a group of mainly Cambridge-based scientists had set up the Society for Psychical Research...

By page 133 he had discovered a little more:

Who actually founded the [SPR] in February 1882 is still hotly debated. But there is no doubt that the intellectual core quickly coalesced around three Cambridge

academics, Henry Sidgwick, Frederic Myers and Edmund Gurney, together with another researcher, Frank Podmore.

Whether Lycett sought and gained access to SPR archives, other than the occasional reference he makes to Journals and Proceedings, is unclear. In his Acknowledgements (pp469-471) he includes Cambridge University Library (Peter Meadows) and Trinity College, Cambridge but there is no specific acknowledgement of the SPR or its officers. Leslie Price advises me that the College of Psychic Studies archives (with the old LSA and BCPS records) were closed to Lycett (and to all others).

Noticeable by its almost complete absence of reference is the Spiritualist National Union. It is only mentioned once – in its representation at the Home Office meeting attended by ACD in July, 1930, a week before his death; and in that reference, Lycett incorrectly describes the SNU's representative, Hannen Swaffer, as a medium: a wrongful presumption! (p452)

Overall, Lycett utilises the new material available to him very well – and he clearly sets out to focus on that new material rather than to rehash ground already covered by earlier biographers. He provides a very comprehensive and useful family tree in the introductory pages and gives 64 photos, many of which had not been shown publicly before.

Regrettably, I noted a few errors and omissions along the way – inevitable I suppose in a detailed production such as this: perhaps biographies should carry an 'E & OE' end-note. Errors which I noted down are:

- Family tree: ACD's daughter, Mary, was born 1889, not 1899; and there are several nicknames missing which tends to introduce a little confusion, e.g. identifying ACD's Aunt Annette (Ann Martha).
- Page 417: ACD did, in fact, make a donation to Rochester City for a memorial to the Fox sisters – of £5,000 for a memorial obelisk, which still stands today near the city centre.
- Page 444: There were six volumes to ACD's *The British Campaign in France and Flanders*, not five (plus the condensed version: *The British Campaigns in Europe 1914-1918*).
- Page 446-447: ACD's Movietone clip was not filmed in 1929 but in October, 1928 shortly before he left on his extended tour to South Africa. He included reference to the tour in the past tense because he knew the clip would not be shown until his return some months later. (The clip runs for 10 minutes and may be viewed on the net at [www.woodlandway.org](http://www.woodlandway.org))
- Page 511: ACD's 71<sup>st</sup> birthday interview in the *Sunday Times* was on 22 May 1930, not 1931. In 1931 it would have been his 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday and would have been via a medium!

In a fore page, Lycett – rather self-indulgently - quotes a paragraph from ACD's *Through the Magic Door*:

The ideal biographer should be a perfectly impartial man, with a sympathetic mind, but a stern determination to tell the absolute truth. One would like the frail, human side of a man as well as the other. I cannot believe that anyone in the world was ever quite so good as the subject of most of our biographies. Surely these worthy people swore a little sometimes, or had a keen eye for a pretty face, or opened the second bottle when they would have done better to stop at the first, or did something to make us feel that they were men and brothers. They need not go to the length of the lady who began a biography of her deceased husband with the words – ‘D... was a dirty man,’ but the books certainly would be more readable, and the subjects more lovable too, if we had greater light and shade in the picture.

Was Lycett impartial? Was he determined to tell the absolute truth? Or does he give his own coloured interpretation of it? Did he go too far in depicting the light and shade in the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? Does he accurately depict the frail side of ACD? - As regards both his personal life and his steadfast endeavours to promote what he believed was the most important thing for mankind – knowledge of an afterlife. Or does he add a bit of zeal to it all in order to make it more ‘readable’ than it might be if he portrayed ACD more virtuously and a paragon for a cause?

Throughout his life, Sir Arthur was known as a fair and honourable man - and somewhere along the line he was even referred to as the ‘last of the chivalrous knights’. If he had ‘obsessions’ one of them was to stand tall for what his strong sense of honour and virtue told him was right, particularly when it came to ‘damsels in distress’. In *Memories & Adventures*, ACD articulated (with reference to his involvement in the Boer War, but with a rider which he could not resist):

Two white lies are permitted to a gentleman, to screen a woman, or to get into a fight when the fight is a rightful one. So I trust I may be forgiven.

The inclusion “to screen a woman” may have been a thought relative to his feelings for Jean at the time of the Boer War – but was the woman he was thinking of screening Jean or Touie? Probably both!

And Lycett quotes ACD’s views on morality in *The Narrative of John Smith* (p.100):

...one universal creed will embrace the whole earth... and the pursuit of virtue, not from any hope of reward or fear of punishment, but from a high and noble love of the right and hatred of the wrong.

Indeed, as a single example, ACD’s reputation throughout the world for having an impeccable sense of honour and fair-mindedness was endorsed when he was invited, in 1909, to referee a world championship boxing match in New York between the great Negro fighter, Johnson, and the white champion, Jeffries (in a letter dated December 9, 1909, *Memories & Adventures*, p.276). ACD had been unanimously approved as

acceptable to both sides – which was quite a distinction in those days of colour discrimination in sport and the imperative need for an impartial referee.

And, at the end of his life, the epitaph which summed his character up was:

“Steel True, Blade Straight”

In many of ACD’s Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes is left in a position to judge the perpetrator of a mysterious crime: to let them go free, knowing in his own mind that they have suffered raw justice enough already, or to turn them over to Scotland Yard and the courts. Holmes frequently exercises that discretion to quietly close the case - knowing that not everything is elementary, my dear Lycett.

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# JOSEPH MAXWELL

Jurist, physician, psychist  
1858-1938

By Renaud Evrard

## Introductory Note by Psypioneer: -

**Renaud Evrard** is a doctoral student preparing a PhD in clinical and differential aspects of exceptional experiences. His Ph.D. work includes a review of the literature on clinical parapsychology, focusing on the psychodynamic approach, with specific interest in the area of differential diagnosis.

He is an active member of the Student Group of Institut Métapsychique International since 2004, and a student affiliate of the Parapsychological Association since 2007. He co-founded in 2007, the Service for Orientation and Help of People with Exceptional Experiences<sup>8</sup> in Paris.

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Thanks to a contact with the great grand-daughter of Joseph Maxwell, I was able to establish the path of this psi pioneer.

Joseph Maxwell was born in 1858, one of three boys. One became a soldier decorated with the Légion D'honneur (Sam Maxwell), and one had a less glorious fate (Raoul Maxwell). Sam and Joseph both married Bernard sisters, owners of the castle Guiraud in Bordeaux, but never had legitimate children. In 1908, Joseph Maxwell moved to Paris further to a promotion. One of his friends asked him to put up his girl Suzanne, who had to continue her studies there. In spite a 25 year age difference, three children arose from this relationship. Maxwell couldn't recognize them officially but housed them in his pied-à-terre at Bordeaux (37 rue Thiac).

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<sup>8</sup> See: - <http://www.pflyceum.org/268.html>

One of these children was Henriette Josephe Félicia Maxwell-Biraben who pursued the work of her father. She published an article in the *Revue Métapsychique* (1952) on the esotericism of the tattoo, and spoke about her father during a conference at the Institut Métapsychique International on November 19th, 1952<sup>9</sup>. Regrettably, because of the problem created by this out of wedlock children and by the marginality of psi field, family taboos still prevent from us reaching some archives of Joseph Maxwell.

Joseph had turned to law studies which made him a prosecuting attorney, then a prosecutor, then a president of the Court of Appeal of Bordeaux. He published texts on "Contemporary mysticism and the criminal law" (1893), and on "A hermetic magistrate: Jean D'Espagnet" (1896). He also completed his training by becoming a doctor, which gave him a better understanding of the psychology of both criminals and mediums. His dissertation thesis was on "Amnesia and consciousness disorders with epileptics" (1903); this placed him in the tradition of another famous inhabitant of Bordeaux, Dr Eugène Azam.

His interest in psychical research began with reading book on Theosophy which gave him the impulse to study occult mysteries. He saw it as a religion more than a science. It is significant that Maxwell's interests did not limit themselves to a critical and experimental approach, but also included much anthropological study of paranormal belief systems and practices. His huge library gathered many works of scientists and philosophers on these eternal questions (Roux, 1939).

In January, 1885, he became an associate member of the Society for Psychical Research and followed their work At Limoges he had the possibility of studying a remarkable medium. The result, however, was unconvincing. He pursued his researches on his return to Bordeaux in 1888 with Miss Agullana; Mr Meurice who produced telekineses in full light; two young mediums of Agen, and some others. He observed numerous intellectual and physical phenomena of mediumship, in particular the "raps", but still did not publish.

It was the experiments with Eusapia Palladino that would finally convince him. The first one took place in Agnelas, in 1895, together with Col. Rochas, Xavier Dariex, Armand Sabatier, Count Arnaud de Gramont and the physicist Watteville. He invited Palladino for other sessions in Bordeaux in 1897. His studies of medicine being finished, he finally published a book summarising his research. At time of this publication in 1903, it was a very important work to show the metapsychist approach, that is a rigorous study of spiritualist phenomena, respecting the psychology of the medium without accepting all the theories.

Maxwell classified the facts in physical and mental phenomena in categories afterwards used by Boirac and Richet with similar naming. Charles Richet contributed the foreword, and the work was republished several times.

When his interest became official, Maxwell had to combine his normal life and his life as a psychist. And he splendidly succeeded in both. As a psychist, he was a member of the

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<sup>9</sup> No trace of this conference was available.

editorial board of the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, then the most influential specialised journal in France. He published some articles, studying in particular with sharpened and just pen the case of the villa Carmen [Marthe Beraud] that excited scandal at this moment (1906). He translated "Life and Matter" of the English physicist Sir Oliver Lodge (1907b), and did forewords for several works in the field (1910c, 1912, 1914b, 1920). In JSPR, he wrote a critical opinion on the cross correspondences (1911-1912). Maxwell often made good methodological contributions, whether in the *Revue Métapsychique* (1927a), the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* (1914a) or in the *Revue de Paris* (1921b). He participated in the activities of the Institut Général Psychologique (sections of "Moral and Criminal Psychology" and of "Psychic and Physiological Researches").

He was also active in the Société Métapsychique with Charles Richet (a name that recalls the dinner meetings at Richet's home, each 13<sup>th</sup> of the month, beginning in 1914 and ending in 1939), then in the IMI (becoming a member on December 15th, 1924). He still participated in numerous experiments, before withdrawing definitely to Bordeaux in 1924. He worked on anthropological or symbolical approaches to intuition (1914a), magic (1921a), bewitchment (1926), divination (1927b) and tarot (1933). His immense knowledge allowed him to be published in the collection "Bibliothèque de Philosophie Scientifique" steered by the skeptic sociologist Gustave Le Bon. His ideas were nevertheless subversive: if magic, bewitchment, divination or tarot were fundamentally genuine, how should anthropology approach them? What could these practices can teach us? These questions anticipated the current constructivist anthropology (Mancini, 2006). His "normal" life was also successful. As a prominent citizen, he was elected on July 26th, 1906 to a seat of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Bordeaux, becoming president in 1919. He also served in the Colonial Institute of Bordeaux, founded in 1901, and as President of the Society of the Friends of the University of Paris.

He was an actor in the legal and scientific life of Bordeaux. He published a book of anticipation on "The world of the year 2000" (1902), and other books focusing on his current time: "Crime and Society" (1909a), and "Contemporary social psychology" (1910b). He produced studies on the psychological action of legal punishments (1910d), on juvenile crime (1911), a "Textbook for a member of a trial jury" (1913a), and two other books on "The Social concept of Crime: History and Evolution" (1914c), and "Social Philosophy and the Current War" (1916a).

He was an observer of the customs of his time who really questioned how justice must be applied. Even there, he was sometimes avant-gardist, for example when he defended the right for abortion. He was supported by a decision of Aix's Court of October 22nd, 1905 which adopted his opinion: "The mother has the right to keep her integrity even at the cost of her fruit." However, as his ideas were too progressive (especially some ideas on the sex education of children and the control of reproduction), Maxwell published his book "Sexual morality" (1907a) under the pen name of Dr Antoine Wylm.

It is surprising to see that the same pen name was used for publishing psychic novels which were translated into other languages (1909b, 1910a, 1913b). In these adventures of

his alter ego, Dr Heurlault, Maxwell described the situations of a man of science engaged with the paranormal in a romantic atmosphere.

Maxwell had in fact more and more trouble to position himself. In spite of his rigour, he was not a commonplace man of science. His curiosity sent him into other fields. For a long time, he was in opposition to spiritualism, because a lack of convincing proofs, but he seemed to change his mind at the end of his life. Several points testify to this passage, without supplying us with certainties.

In 1931, when the spiritualist founder of the IMI, Jean Meyer died, a conflict arose around the legacy of Meyer. Maxwell took a stand with Hubert Forestier, Meyer's own medium, in order to keep IMI and the Company of Metapsychic Studies associated. Several persons in the IMI, especially Eugène Osty, wished the ideological and financial independence of the IMI because they could not accept Forestier as the life-administrator. (cf. Lachapelle, 2002).

Another aspect is the testimony of "spiritologist"<sup>10</sup> Georges Clauzure, who called Maxwell his master, and repeated that he became a spiritualist in his old age<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, this aspect did not appear in his papers.

Maxwell brought a fresh wind on the research of his time, because he appeared as an open empiricist, able to discuss concepts such as *péri-esprit*, astral body, radiant force, etc., without ever falling into dogmatism.. His precautions to avoid and detect fraud were well-known. He was clear in his assertions, just in his criticism of testimonies, and in proposed physiological or psychological explanations, while remaining very careful. He never he moved beyond his competence. He spoke about "subconsciousness" rather than about "spirits", but it was immediately to criticize this incomplete theory of subconsciousness. He defined in a very empirical way a medium "as a person in the presence of whom psychic phenomena can be observed". He described correctly the state of nervous instability which is a favourable condition for the effervescence of mediumship, but immediately stressed that the pathological interpretations of the personality of the medium as a hysterical or neurasthenic one were erroneous. Even if he used the idea of an unknown force, different from classic ones, he suggested that its manifestations obey nevertheless some laws. He admitted that the force is intelligent but wondered if that intelligence did not come from the experimenters, under the shape of the product of a collective consciousness. As with Ochorowicz, he thought that the minds of the sitters in the circle could affect the shape and type of phenomena obtained (Alvarado, 2004).

However, it is difficult to say just how far he was affected by these researches, carried out mostly alone. René Sudre - whose first read book on psychical research was by Maxwell - wondered (1926, p. 205) about his statements of seeing "od" or "aura" lights (in

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<sup>10</sup> By this term, Georges Clauzure wanted to distance himself from the badly connoted "spiritualist" term, appointing a psychological study of the modifications of the personality of mediums.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication of Yves Lignon of October 5th, 2008.

particular, “auras” around fingers). Sudre thought that it was only a matter of suggestion. But a question arises then: which other phenomena were suggested to Maxwell?

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# EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN

## CHASING DOWN EMMA

[www.ehbritten.org](http://www.ehbritten.org)

*A new dedicated website in the making*

Marc Demarest asks: -

For a projected biography of Emma Hardinge Britten, which is intended both to present EHB in all her complexity and to do justice to her role as the leading propagandist and apologist for the early modern Spiritualism movement, I am eager to hear from anyone working on or interested in EHB, anyone in possession of ephemera related to Britten, including material from her various lecture tours, and anyone with copies of the numerous Spiritualist magazines in which she published advertisements and articles, as well material anyone with material - letters, account books and so forth - from her personal life, travels and business ventures.

I trust that a concerted effort to pull together primary and secondary materials on EHB will help remedy the lack of a modern biography of EHB and the lack of an EHB bibliography, and to uncover and sift, insofar as it is possible, the scattered (and it seems contradictory) documentary facts of both her early life and her final UK period (as well as her time in the United States and in Europe).

All responses and offers of assistance will be gratefully received and acknowledged, all collaborators are welcome, and all materials treated with the utmost care.

Marc Demarest  
[marc@noumenal.com](mailto:marc@noumenal.com)

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# Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail

Better known under the pseudonym of

**Allan Kardec**

1804-1869

## **Introductory Note by Psypioneer:**

In the November issue of Psypioneer<sup>12</sup> we reprinted Alexander Aksakof's research (published in *The Spiritualist*, August 13, 1875,) into the historical origin of Kardec's book, *Le Livre des Esprits (The Spirits' Book)* first issued in 1856, which marked the beginning of Kardec's Spiritism.

This article has prompted a welcome response from Dr. Moreira-Almeida, M.D., Ph.D. Professor of Psychiatry, School of Medicine, Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil. Director of the Research Center in Spirituality and Health (NUPES) at UFJF, Brazil.

This link<sup>13</sup> will introduce you to other papers by Dr. Moreira-Almeida, including also one on historical aspects of Kardec's work that he presented at the PA conference, 2008.

Published below is the full response from Dr. Alexander Moreira-Almeida: -

Dear Paul J. Gaunt,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you for the wonderful work at Psypioneer News. It is an important source for all of us interested in history of the field.

I write below some considerations regarding Aksakof's paper on Kardec published in the last newsletter.

Despite the title ("Researches on the historical origin of the reincarnation speculations of French spiritualists"), the paper is not based on a historical research. It seems to be entirely based on an interview with the medium Celina Japhet in 1873. This medium had worked with Kardec but later had severe conflicts with him (as we can read from Aksakof's paper). So, probably, she was not an unbiased source. It seems that Aksakof did not check the reliability or validity of the data presented. The result is a report strongly biased against Kardec and with a lot of factual mistakes and imprecisions. Some objective flaws of this paper:

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<sup>12</sup> See: - <http://woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.11November08..pdf>

<sup>13</sup> See: - [www.hoje.org.br/elsh](http://www.hoje.org.br/elsh)

The year of the two editions of the Spirit's book are wrong: the correct: 1st: 1857, 2nd (revised): 1860. (<http://www.espirito.org.br/portal/artigos/geeu/le2-rosto.html> )

The statement that "The story of his first investigations into spirit manifestations is somewhat obscure" is not well grounded. Kardec described it at the introduction and prolegomena of Spirit's Book. The second part of Kardec's book "Oevres Postumes" describes these first investigations in some detail. Kardec's methods are also detailed in the 1st chapter of "Genesis" and at the Introduction of "Gospel According to Spiritism" (These books are available for free download at [www.usspiritistcouncil.com/ebooks.htm](http://www.usspiritistcouncil.com/ebooks.htm)). However, the best source to understand Kardec's methods are the twelve volumes of *Revue Spirite - Journal d'Études Psychologiques* (Spiritist Journal – Journal of Psychological Studies), a monthly journal he edited and published from 1858 until his death in 1869. He used the *Revue Spirite* to present reports and to discuss possible explanations of all sorts of physical and mental mediumistic manifestations. He regularly presented hypotheses in the *Revue* to be tested and analyzed by its readers. Kardec considered this journal as a "trialground", a kind of "proceedings" of Spiritism. The first paper published at the *Revue* provides us with some sense on Kardec's methods and thoughts (Janvier 1858, Introduction: <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/charles.kempf/rs1858/18580101.htm> ). Many texts and theories first published at the *Revue* were later published in a developed form in one of Kardec's books. The *Revue Spirite* can be downloaded for free at <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/charles.kempf/rs140.htm>

The statement that Kardec pushed on mediums his own ideas on reincarnation is a controversial one, but I'm not aware of any objective evidence of that. Kardec stated that he, in the beginning of his investigations, had strong objections to this idea (*Revue Spirite* Février 1862, *La Réincarnation en Amérique*; Novembre 1858, *De la pluralité des existences corporelles*).

Also, it is not true that Kardec ignored DD Home. Only at the *Revue Spirite* (between 1858 to 1869), there are 136 nominal citations to M. Home. Usually praising him, his moral behavior, his great mediumistic skills, and defending him against criticisms. Home's book "*Révélation sur ma vie surnaturelle*" was included among the books that should compose a "Spiritist Library". This paper was published by Kardec in the year of his death (1869). Even DD Home has recognized in a letter (Oct 1st, 1875) to the same *The Spiritualist* published less than 2 months after Aksakof's letter that Kardec had cited him at *Medium's Book*. Aksakof's letter resulted also in the publication of 2 letters (from Anna Blackwell Aug 27, and from P G Leymarie, the editor of *Revue Spirite* Oct 8, 1865) that were answers to Aksakof's letter.

Unfortunately, Aksakof's letter, this unreliable reference, was a major source about Kardec in English spoken word. It was the base of several biographies of Kardec such the ones published by Fodor in his *Encyclopedia* and by Emma Harding Britten at *Nineteenth Century Miracles*.

To correct some of these imprecisions regarding Kardec's life and work, I wrote the paper below:

Allan Kardec and the Development of a Research Program in Psychic Experiences:  
[http://www.hoje.org.br/site/arg/artigos/Kardec\\_research\\_program\\_PA2008.pdf](http://www.hoje.org.br/site/arg/artigos/Kardec_research_program_PA2008.pdf)

Best wishes,

Alexander.

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Psypioneer stated in the November Newsletter:<sup>14</sup> - "Many of the websites mentioning Kardec state incorrectly that the *The Spirits' Book* was first published in 1857. In fact, a Revised Edition was issued in 1857". The first edition being 1856.

Alexander's reply states: - The year of the two editions of the Spirit's book are wrong: the correct: 1st: 1857, 2nd (revised): 1860. (<http://www.espirito.org.br/portal/artigos/geeu/le2-rosto.html> )

Anna Blackwell who translated *The Spirits Book* in 1875; states in her Translator's Preface:<sup>15</sup> -

*From the materials thus furnished to him from every quarter of the globe he enlarged and completed *The Spirits' Book*, under the direction of the spirits by whom it was originally dictated; the "Revised Edition" of which work, brought out by him in 1857 (vide "Preface to the Revised Edition," p. 19\*) has become the recognised text-book of the school of Spiritualist Philosophy so intimately associated with his name.*

#### \* PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

*IN the first edition of this work, we announced our intention to publish a Supplement treating of points for which it had been impossible to find room in that edition, or which might be suggested by subsequent investigations; but the new matter proved to be so closely connected with what had been previously published as to render its publication in a separate volume inexpedient. We therefore preferred to await the reprinting of the work, taking advantage of the opportunity thus afforded to fuse the whole of the materials together, to suppress redundancies, and to make a more methodical arrangement of its contents. This new edition may consequently be considered as a new work, although the principles originally laid down have undergone no change,*

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<sup>14</sup> Page 258: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.11November08..pdf>

<sup>15</sup> See page 13 & 19 [http://www.usspiritistcouncil.com/PDF/spirits\\_book.pdf](http://www.usspiritistcouncil.com/PDF/spirits_book.pdf)

*excepting in a very few instances which will be found to constitute complements and explanations rather than modifications.*

*Allan Kardec*

**1875 correspondence about Allan Kardec and Spiritism will continue in the February issue.**

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## **RECENT PAPERS - A NEW FEATURE IN PSYPIONEER**

The title “Recent papers” has a long history in journals, and in particular was used in “The Christian Parapsychologist” around 1990. It provides an opportunity to note papers of interest that have appeared elsewhere, and might otherwise escape the attention of readers. The notes, which may comment or summarise the papers, can be written by a variety of contributors. We are launching such a series in Psypioneer. Some of the papers will be in well-known psychic publications, but most appear in scholarly journals more difficult to access.

Access is indeed a problem. Quite often a general historical publication carries an article of interest to us, but it is naturally protected by copyright, and securing a photocopy or PDF is not easy. But we think that readers would at least like to know of recent papers, even if they are not easy to obtain.

1. *Miriam Wallraven “A Mere Instrument” or “Proud as Lucifer” Self-presentations in the occult autobiographies by Emma Hardinge Britten (1900) and Annie Besant (1893). In Women’s Writing 15:3,390-411*

Last year, the journal “Women’s Writing”<sup>16</sup> devoted an issue to Women and the Victorian Occult.

Whereas Annie Besant has long received attention in women’s studies, this paper marks perhaps the emergence of Mrs Britten as a suitable subject for such analysis. The text used is the 1999 SNU reprint of the Autobiography, and no additional historical information is deployed. Dr Wallraven is concerned with the social situation of these two female occult writers, and their sources of authority- spirit guides in one case, theosophical masters in the other ( the term “ascended masters” used by Wallraven does

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title%7Econtent=g905687724%7Edb=all>

not belong to that era.). Mrs Britten, as a medium, assumed a more passive role than Mrs Besant.

Wallraven suggests “As with Annie Besant, public speaking constitutes the most important action in her life” (p.397). In retrospect however, we might consider her historical work more important- others would nominate the transmission of the Seven Principles.

LP...

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## MARK TWAIN And EARLIEST SPIRITUALIST FICTION

By Gerald O’Hara

Which is the earliest piece of fiction to feature Spiritualism? I recently come across a contender for this new crown when I realised that Mark Twain’s first book, “The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other stories” contained a short story; called “Among the Spirits”. This originally appeared as “Among the Spiritualists” in *The Californian* in January, 1866. *The Californian* was a San Francisco weekly literary journal established by Charles Henry Webb in May 1864. Shortly after Bret Harte assumed the reins of editor, Mark Twain was hired to contribute one article per week. He received \$50 per month for his contributions. Approximately fifty Mark Twain articles ultimately appeared in *The Californian*. Several of Twain's contributions to *The Californian* were collected and published by Webb in 1867 as *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County, and Other Sketches*.

Born in 1835 -1910 Samuel Langhorne Clemens was better known by his pen name, Mark Twain. Twain was not a Spiritualist and was in general critical of Christianity and organised religion. However, the short story though satirical does show some knowledge of “table rapping” and the ending does show some understanding of the nature of communication.

The Bradford Observer for 1853 published the following doggerel on table rapping

*“For works of labour or of skill  
We would our likening prove  
For the Satan finds some tables still  
For idle hands to move*

However, I know of no other sympathetic piece of prose that is as early as that of Mark Twain's. Robert Browning's "Mr Sludge The Medium", was written some time after 1868. Spiritualist publisher James Burns printed a novel, "Intuition" in 1878. Henry James's "Bostonians" was written in 1886, with its famous hostile pen portrait of Cora LV Richmond-Tappan. The genre was to grow and I could cite many fictional pieces. Right down to today; on Monday 28th Dec ITV showed "Affinity" a drama with a Victorian Spiritualist theme. *The Spiritual Séance*<sup>17</sup> also known as *Among the Spiritualists*<sup>18</sup>, for being the candidate for the earliest literary portrait of a Spiritualist meeting.

Gerald O'Hara

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## Quiz answers for December 2008 issue -see p. 308.

Here are the answers to the quiz, in which each question refers successively to an issue, beginning with January 2008.

- 1) Jan. What was Mrs Miller's gift?

The donated premises of the original site of Edinburgh Psychic College in Heriot Row, Edinburgh by Mrs Miller were in memory of her husband.

Also this is the title of the new history of the College by Gerald O Hara and Ann Harrison available from us.

- 2) Feb. Who struck a new note in Psychic News

Susan Farrow, a professional musician, became editor of PN, and has since widened the contributor base considerably, with historical material often represented.

- 3) March. Who convened the meeting at which the ISF was first proposed?

At a 1922 Congress convened by the SNU, M. Beversluis of the Dutch Society of Spiritualists proposed an international body.

(So when the SNU withdrew from the ISF in 2008, it was indeed a sad moment.)

- 4) April. Who was suggested as the most influential Spiritualist.

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<sup>17</sup> The Spiritual Séance: - <http://www.twainquotes.com/18660204t.html>

<sup>18</sup> Among the Spiritualists see: - <http://www.twainquotes.com/18660204at.html>

W. H. Stead, the subject of a new biography, "Maiden Tribute", by Grace Eckley. The biography has also been sympathetically received by the Salvation Army<sup>19</sup>.

5) May. Where was physical mediumship filmed in infra-red in 1960?

At Camp Chesterfield, Indiana. Unfortunately, the film revealed that various Camp personalities played the parts of the materialisations.

6) June. What did Mrs Duncan say when invited to sit at the SPR?

She replied that she would not sit for a million. This was pity, as she would have been safer with them than with Harry Price's organisation

7) July. How old was Madame Blavatsky's first husband when he married her?

Mr Blavatsky was 39 or 40, but some Theosophical web sites describe him as elderly.

8) Aug. What was Sir Oliver Lodge's connection with organised Spiritualism?

He tried to dissociate himself from the official movement, although his views had much in common with the LSA.

9) Sept. What journal was saved this month by a godly repentance?

The Christian Parapsychologist, founded in 1975, which was threatened with closure by a working party of its owner, CFPSS. But the CFPSS council reversed the decision. This was another story not reported elsewhere.

10) Oct. Where is the grave of Stainton Moses?

Bedford cemetery, England. We hope to publish in our next issue a photograph of the grave as it was in 1974 when first discovered by a Pyspioneer contributor.

11) Nov. When was Helen Duncan born?

According to her birth certificate, she was born on 25 November 1897.

12) Dec. What became of the Yorkshire Spiritual Telegraph?

Founded in 1855, in 1857 it became the British Spiritual Telegraph, closing in 1859. The earliest regular UK Spiritualist newspaper. A volume was included in the Stansted donation to the SPR, which sold it to a Council member.

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq%5Cwww\\_sa.nsf/vw-sublinks/9C3A9AD8EBA039EC8025753000121B9C?openDocument](http://www.salvationarmy.org/ihq%5Cwww_sa.nsf/vw-sublinks/9C3A9AD8EBA039EC8025753000121B9C?openDocument)

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Please e-mail [psypioneer@aol.com](mailto:psypioneer@aol.com) for details

*'Helen Duncan - The Mystery Show Trial'* By Robert Hartley @ £12.50 + Pp ISBN: 978-0-9553420-8-0.

See Psypioneer 3.11: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.11November07..pdf>

*'The Cathars and Arthur Guirdham'* **Published by Psypioneer** @ £4.50 Inc U.K., postage, elsewhere (airmail) £4.95 Inc postage. ISBN: 978 0 9536719 3 9.

See Psypioneer 4.4: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.4April08..pdf>

*'Aquarian Evangelist: The Age of Aquarius as It Dawned in the Mind of Levi Dowling'* By John Benedict Buescher @ £14.50 – incl. U.K. postage.

See Psypioneer 4.1: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08..pdf>

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See Psypioneer 4.1: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP4.1January08..pdf>

*'Dead Men's Embers'* By Gerald O'Hara @ £14.99 +Pp £2.50 (U.K.) ISBN: 978-0-9514534-6-9. See Psypioneer book review: -

<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07..pdf>

*'Six Lectures on Theology and Nature'* By Emma Hardinge first published in 1860. **Re-Published by Psypioneer** @ £14.95 + pp. ISBN: 978-0-9556539-0-2

See Psypioneer 3.6 issue: - <http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.6June07..pdf>

*'Magical Spiritualism - a warning address given in 1878 to mark thirty years of Modern Spiritualism'*, Andrew Jackson Davis. Published May 2000 by Psychic Pioneer Publications, this is a small booklet 7pp £2.00 incl. U.K., postage (please add 20% for airmail).

*'The Mystery of Stainton Moses an address given in 1992 on the centenary of his death'* Leslie Price Published December 1999 by Psychic Pioneer Publications, this is a small booklet 8pp £2.50 Inc U.K., postage (please add 20% for airmail).

*'Occultism and Spiritualism* – a book review by, Stainton Moses originally published under the pseudonym M.A. (Oxon). Published 1999 by Psychic Pioneer Publications, this is a small booklet 10pp £2.50 Inc U.K., postage (please add 20% for airmail).

All three Psychic Pioneer Publications £6.00 Inc U.K., postage (please add 20% for airmail).

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Paul J. Gaunt

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