

PSYPIONEER JOURNAL

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EST 2004

Volume 7, No 5: May 2011

Fraudulent Medium of the Century? – Leslie Price	133
First Account: Business with the Beyond - Egon Larsen	135
Second account: - Simeon Edmunds	142
The Strange Case of Katherine Hayward, Liebie Pugh and Frank Turner - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	146
Is William Roy Overdoing It? - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	150
Did William Roy Fool Canada's Premier? - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	152
William Roy Lies About "Test" Séance - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	156
Sequel to William Roy's Confessed Frauds - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	158
Fake Medium Cheated her of £15,000 - <i>The Two Worlds</i>	159
Self-Confessed Fake Medium Wm. Roy Works as Bill Silver - <i>Psychic News</i>	163
'I Lied About Fake Seances' William Roy Tells Newspaper - <i>Psychic News</i>	166
Books for sale	168
How to obtain this Journal by email	169

IN THIS ISSUE

William George Holroyd - William George Plowright

Alias

William Roy – Bill Silver: Fraudulent Spiritualist medium

FRAUDULENT MEDIUM OF THE CENTURY?



William Roy¹ (1911-1977) is a fading memory in UK Spiritualism. But he has some claim to be the most troublesome fraudulent medium of the twentieth century² not least because he re-appeared later under a different assumed name.

We are reprinting first below two general accounts of Roy's fraud. The first is by technical journalist Egon Larsen,³ who settled in Britain.

This tells the story in a way sympathetic to Maurice Barbanell, editor of *Two Worlds* at the time (1958). Roy sold his story to the *Sunday Pictorial*, now called the *Sunday Mirror*. But by the time of Larsen's book, Barbanell was in his second term as editor also of *Psychic News*.

The other, slightly earlier account is by Simeon Edmunds in his book *Spiritualism: a Critical Survey*.⁴ Simeon and Barbie had a long-running feud, and sniped at each other sharply in *PN*, *LIGHT* and other publications. (It once fell to their mutual friend, Archie Jarman to persuade each to drop a libel case against the other.)

Simeon may well have used the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) file on the Roy case, especially if it contains the *Sunday Pictorial* articles in full. Donald West,⁵ when research officer of the Society, had tangled with William Roy. In January 1948, JSPR⁶ reported on responses to an offer of money for a physical mediumship test:

¹ Photograph of William Roy is taken from *The Two Worlds* February 22, 1958, page 2.

² *Gale Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*: William Roy: —<http://www.answers.com/topic/william-roy>

³ Nachlass Egon Larsen 1904-1990:—<http://www.br-online.de/content/cms/Universalseite/2008/04/03/cumulus/BR-online-Publikation--107572-20080402131931.pdf>

⁴ *Spiritualism: a Critical Survey* by Simeon Edmunds, Aquarian Press, November 1966.

⁵ More on Donald West, in this issue see page 156:—*William Roy Lies About "Test" Séance*.

⁶ Journal, Society for Psychical Research (JSPR) has been published continuously since 1884

“The third medium, Mr William Roy, after a preliminary visit to inspect the infra-red telescope, came for a sitting on 13 October 1947. He was to bring with him his own circle of sitters, but on the day of the sitting he informed us that they declined to accompany him. Mr Roy went into an alleged trance and the “control” spoke, but no physical phenomena occurred. Mr Roy declared himself satisfied with the conditions at the time, and agreed to come again a fortnight later. However, he later cancelled this appointment, on the plea of another engagement, and failed to give an alternative date. On 12 December he was reminded by letter that the offer closed on 31 December. He replied that neither time-limits nor Prize Money interested him, but gave one to understand that he might offer himself to the S.P.R. for investigation in 1948.”

Some people blamed the researchers for the unsuccessful attempt to woo physical mediums, but Donald West noted in JSPR May 1948:

“Mr William Roy, one of the mediums in question, produced considerable trumpet movements and “voices” at a séance at the International Institute for Experimental Metaphysics at which I was present. The circle there contained a much higher proportion of sceptically-minded persons than the circle with which Mr Roy sat at the Society. The same medium has been able to give public demonstrations of the “direct voice” from inside a dark cabinet on the theatre stage. The audience at these performances must sometimes contain people who are really antagonistic, but the “trance state” comes and the “voices” are heard promptly and infallibly. The precautions taken by the investigators, not their state of mind, is the cause of the stoppage of “phenomena”

Despite producing nothing, Roy possibly made use of the SPR to enhance his reputation, for Dr West explained:

“While on the subject of the investigation of Mr Roy and other physical mediums, I should like to take this opportunity to correct an extraordinary rumour which several people tell me they have heard in spiritualist circles. According to this rumour, Mr Roy was stripped and shaved and generally treated very unsympathetically. It is said that there was an interruption in the middle of the sitting and that he sustained injury.

“The facts are these: Mr Roy was neither stripped nor searched, but came in and sat down in his ordinary clothes. Two spiritualists from Leeds who wanted to make enquiries were admitted by the caretaker and were shown into a room next door to the séance room. Hearing a séance beginning, and wanting very much to attend it, they tapped on the door. I said, “Go away, we are engaged.” The medium was not yet in à trance. That is all. Later, during the séance, Mr Roy slumped forward off his chair on to the ground. He said afterwards a chair with arms would have prevented this, but at the commencement, when he was asked if there was anything he wanted, he made no request of this kind. He told

us at the time that apart from this the conditions had been perfectly satisfactory.”

Despite the SPR explanation in their own private journal, one would guess that some Spiritualists did believe that William Roy narrowly escaped martyrdom at the SPR!

We would need to treat Roy’s own 1958 story of his brilliant frauds critically, quite apart from how own later statements. After all, the newspaper which bought his story would have wanted something sensational. Not everyone whom he thought he had deceived was taken in. Still, there are lessons to be learnt. Some mediums featured in Spiritualist papers are actually cheating, taking advantage of lax conditions. If Roy could achieve some of his frauds with the technology of 1950, what could he achieve today?

L.P

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**The first account by Egon Larsen:—<sup>7</sup>**

## **BUSINESS WITH THE BEYOND**

A man carrying a fair-sized suitcase called to see the editor<sup>8</sup> of *Psychic News*, the leading spiritualist journal in London, one day in 1952. In the office the visitor opened the case. It contained a variety of electrical equipment: a microphone, an amplifier, an earphone, a miniature loudspeaker, a pair of shoes with copper plates on their soles, and a telescopic rod looking like the aerial of a car radio.

‘I am the assistant of William Roy, the medium,’ explained the visitor, ‘and this is a complete set of the electrical apparatus he had made for installation in his new house. It is to be used for communication between Roy in the séance room and myself in an adjoining one.’

The editor was not altogether surprised. For some time there had been doubts among sincere spiritualists about the methods of one of England’s most famous and successful mediums; still, the exposure of William Roy as a fraud and a fake by his own helpmate was somewhat unexpected.

As a result of that visit at the *Psychic News* office, a number of well-known English spiritualists asked William Roy and his assistant to attend a meeting where the matter was to be discussed. They both came—and seemed to be the best of friends again. The assistant

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<sup>7</sup> *THE DECEIVERS Lives of the great imposters*, by Egon Larsen John Baker, London 1966 pages 134-142.

<sup>8</sup> *Psychic News* editor at this time was A.W. Austin, 1946 – 1953.

had changed his story. He had tried to revenge himself on Mr Roy after a personal quarrel, he said, by accusing him of using apparatus of that kind to cheat his 'sitters' at séances. The quarrel had now been made up, and both men explained that the equipment had been built merely 'for the sake of a bet'.

The spiritualists were of two minds. Should they publish the story and leave the readers to accept whichever explanation they preferred? Would the evidence of fraud be sufficient to convince a jury if the case came before a court? On the other hand, should the fake medium be allowed to go on with his deception? William Roy pleaded with them not to take any further steps. He gave an undertaking to leave the country and go to South Africa, where he would try to make a living without resorting to his 'psychic powers'. Roy's promise satisfied the spiritualists, and they decided to take no action; but they wrote to their friends in South Africa, warning them of the medium's impending visit, and asking them to keep an eye on him.

Thus William Roy's brilliantly successful career as a medium seemed to have come to an end, and the spiritualist believers must have felt relieved. He had been, to say the least, a controversial figure. Investigations had shown that his original name was William George Holroyd, which he later changed to Plowright. He was born in 1911, and he had been in conflict with the law on a number of occasions as a young man. For some time he had worked at the telephone exchange in Slough, where he acquired a smattering of electro-technical knowledge.

It was during the Second World War that William Plowright became William Roy, the spiritualist medium—comforter of the bereaved who longed to communicate with their dead. There was nothing but praise and admiration for him in the spiritualist world during that period. 'Some of the finest evidence ever heard at a public meeting was witnessed at the Kingsway Hall when William Roy gave a demonstration of the Direct-Voice,' reported the *Psychic News* in 1947. A year later he was given the enthusiastic headline, SPIRIT VOICES SPOKE EVEN WHEN MEDIUM'S MOUTH WAS FILLED WITH DYED WATER. The dyed water, explained the article in the spiritualist journal, had been put in Roy's mouth by an investigator who knew all the tricks of the trade; and it was still there after a séance during which all kinds of spirits had spoken. Doctors tested the medium, tied his hands, put sticking plaster over his mouth; still the spirit voices were heard. Some people swore they had actually seen Roy's 'spirit guides' materialize during a séance; they felt those unmistakable cold breezes so familiar to spiritualists, as though the portals of the other world were suddenly thrust open; they smelt lilac scent, heard messages in Swedish and Spanish, French and Yiddish, and even in Malay; most important of all, they recognized the voices of their departed friends and relatives, speaking of things which no outsider could possibly have known. There were, in Britain alone, over 100,000 people up and down the country who could vouch for the genuine powers of William Roy as an intermediary between our world and the next, and the late Mr Mackenzie King, Canada's Prime Minister, who believed in spiritualism, was said to have heard Queen Victoria's and Mr Gladstone's voices at a private seance given by William Roy.

Was it possible that this man had fooled everybody? Still, with Roy safely out of England, and, apparently steering clear of spiritualism in South Africa, the question was perhaps better left in abeyance. In 1955, however, news came from that country that he was again arranging séances. And, sure enough, soon he was back in London to resume his activities.



### *'Me Just Simple Indian'*

Maurice Barbanell, editor of the London spiritualist journal *Two Worlds*,<sup>9</sup> decided that the time had come for a showdown. In August 1955 he published a warning, and named William Roy as one of four mediums<sup>10</sup> who 'had been exposed in fraud, yet still continue to give sittings'.

A short time later Barbanell received a telephone call from a stranger who said he had a number of remarkable ghost photographs and wanted him to come and look at them that same evening. As he left the office building, a young woman who had 'lain in wait for him, started to set about him with a riding crop', as a policeman reported when the case came up before the magistrate. It was Mrs Mary Plowright, William Roy's loyal wife,<sup>11</sup> who had felt that this was the proper way, to deal with a man who doubted her husband's honesty. It cost her three pounds plus the riding crop, which got broken during the assault; but her feelings remained untempered. 'I am not sorry for what I did,' she told the magistrate.

William Roy himself, however, did not believe that his wife's old-fashioned methods of justice were sufficient to restore his honour. He started a lawsuit against Mr Barbanell, which held up the spiritualist journals for two and a half years in their efforts to rid the movement of a fraudulent medium. Then, in February 1958 Roy suddenly dropped his lawsuit, and undertook to pay its costs. In the next issue of *Two Worlds*, Barbanell told all he knew from his investigators about Roy's practices. It must have cost the editor much heart-searching before he decided to publish and be damned; for damned he would surely be by the legions of believers who just could not accept that they had been duped by that famous medium.

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<sup>9</sup> Photo of Maurice Barbanell taken from:—*The Two Worlds*, June 28, 1958, page 3.

<sup>10</sup> The other mediums were:—Charles Basham, Arthur Phillips and John Scammell. Pspioneer will look at John Scammell in a later issue.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Brown's *The Voice Box*, gives some details on Roy's married life, taken from *The Fraudulent Mediumship of WILLIAM FOY [Roy]* by Tim Haigh, Editor of *Psychic News* 1992-95:—"William Roy died in 1977 at Hastings, Sussex, suffering from cancer, leaving three children, three widows and a bigamous bride." See:—<http://www.the-voicebox.com/mediumshipmisdemeanour.htm>

What now followed was even more amazing than the incident of the assistant with the suitcase. The London *Sunday Pictorial*, sensing an interesting follow-up story, sent a reporter to William Roy to ask him what he had to say about those disclosures. ‘I am not worried,’ was the reply. ‘*Of course I am a phoney.* So are other mediums. It is true that I have tricked women at séances, but I did no harm.’ And he concluded an agreement with the *Sunday Pictorial* for the publication of what might be termed his auto-exposure—or, to quote one of the headlines under which the paper printed it in five instalments: ‘A Shocking Confession of how William Roy Cheated his Way to Fame as a Spiritualist Medium’.

Like most impostors, Roy could truthfully claim that he had made at least some of his victims ‘happy as well as poorer’; that he did, after all ‘give them what they wanted’. He, too, got what he wanted; luxury, cars, love, and £50,000 in the bank as a result of a decade of spiritualist hocus-pocus.

How did he do it?

Long before the visitors arrived for a séance at his bungalow in north-west London, called the ‘Hampstead Psychic Centre’, he was busy with his preparations. Only sitters who had announced their intention of coming a good while beforehand were admitted, so that Roy could collect the necessary information. Each of them had an index card in the medium’s file.<sup>12</sup>

On arrival, the visitor had to sign a form saying that he understood that ‘no message phenomena’ or other specific results could be guaranteed. Visitors had to leave their coats, handbags, attaché cases and other belongings in the cloakroom: the reason given was that they might fidget with their things during the sitting, thus disturbing the ‘atmosphere’. But as soon as they were in the waiting-room, Roy’s assistant would go through the bags and pockets for possible clues, letters, notebooks, and such like; and there were concealed microphones in the waiting-room so that Roy or his assistant could listen to the visitors’ conversations, which often yielded important clues about themselves and what they expected to hear during the séance.

As a rule there were twelve participants, sitting close together in the darkened room. To get them in the proper mood, a radiogram played ‘Ave Maria’. Then Roy would begin to breathe heavily and speak in the voice of one of his ‘spirit guides’: sometimes as ‘Dr

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<sup>12</sup> A similar fraud was carried out by a Camp Chesterfield physical medium who called himself Mavis Lamar Keene who worked a career of thirteen years as a fraudulent Spiritualist medium. He worked on similar lines as William Roy e.g., card indexes, secret doors, and arrangements with other fake mediums for the exchange of information. His story is told in *The Psychic Mafia*, (Allen Spraggett and foreword by the Rev. William V. Rauscher) first published by St. Martin's Press, New York, 1976:—

[http://www.mysticlightpress.com/index.php?page\\_id=55](http://www.mysticlightpress.com/index.php?page_id=55) Bill Rauscher is no stranger to *Psypioneer* e.g. see his articles on Eileen Garrett, Stainton Moses etc., search “Rauscher” at: [www.woodlandway.org](http://www.woodlandway.org) then *PsyPioneer Journal*.

M. Lamar Keene can be seen on video see:—

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:kQDOnUxnKXkJ:www.tviscool.com/play.php%3Fvid%3D300+Camp+Chesterfield+keene&cd=2&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=uk&source=www.google.co.uk>

Wilson', 'Marie', or 'Joey', but more often in the hoarse voice and exotic accent of 'Tinka the Red Indian'. There was a good reason for preferring Tinka as a 'spirit guide'; for if the sitters' questions became too tricky, that go-between from the Beyond would say, 'No can answer—me just simple Indian.'

After another spell of heavy breathing, Roy would announce that 'your departed friends and relatives' were now present and would try to speak to the sitters. By means of his telescopic rod, slipped out from his pocket, he would then pick up his 'speaking trumpet' from the floor; it was covered with luminous paint so that it would seem to float in the air in the dark room. This usually brought the first gasp of amazement from the spellbound audience.

Meanwhile Roy had put a small earphone, of the type worn by deaf people, in his ear, clipping the wire lead to the terminal of a private telephone line which connected him with the adjoining room where the assistant was already waiting, microphone in hand, to pass on the information he had gathered from pockets and handbags. Roy had now an ample supply of names, addresses, dates of birthdays, deaths, travels, meetings, and so on; information about past and coming events illnesses, problems, and plans.

Now he would make the 'ghosts' speak. Sometimes the voices came from various directions in the room; for this effect he employed a miniature loudspeaker at the end of one of his telescopic rods. In this way he could also use his own voice or that of his assistant for special effects. The connection between the loudspeaker and the assistant's microphone was established by means of copper plates on his soles, which he pressed on carpet tacks wired to the adjoining room. Often, 'ghost' voices came from a tape recorder.

The voices would address individual sitters, who eagerly 'recognized' them as those of their dear departed. Occasionally Roy went to the extra trouble of letting a spirit 'materialize' in dim light—by the usual method of making some butter muslin, called 'ectoplasm' in spiritualistic language, issue from his mouth. He also used ghostly masks or let a white-robed assistant appear from a secret door. In this manner Tinka the Red Indian was made to appear on special occasions, and was found to be seven feet tall!

Being a methodical man, William Roy did not rely entirely on the chance information from ransacked handbags and coat pockets. Before admitting some wealthy widow or other promising victim, he looked up voters' lists, compared obituaries, consulted *Who's Who*, or went to the General Register at Somerset House for death and birth certificates (which also give the names of parents and grandparents). Last wills were, of course, especially fascinating reading matter for the medium. Thus he was fully prepared for the private meetings for which many rich women asked him if they did not wish to share their secrets with a dozen other people. Roy also had arrangements with other fake mediums for the exchange of information, and once he undertook a 'combined operation' with an American colleague, with 'spirit messages' on tape sent across the Atlantic between the groups of sitters.

There were, of course, doubting Thomases, or at least disappointed sitters. A Letter to the Editor of a spiritualist paper in London expressed what the writer thought of one of Roy's performances: 'My friend and I left, both feeling what a waste of time it had been. . . . The séance was held for one reason only: the collection of fees . . . £10-12 for a séance lasting about an hour is very nice work, but it is not good spiritualism.' On the other hand, Roy gave his services free to old-age pensioners. He could afford to, making a weekly average of £200 as he did.

### *Queen Victoria's Watch*

'Let no man or woman say smugly: "Roy would never have taken me in with that stuff",' he wrote in his confession, 'because I deceived the highest in the land, as well as the humblest. When I think of the Big Ones I completely bamboozled, I feel a little like a big-game hunter does when he looks at his trophies. . . . My most important sitter, I suppose, was one of the world's greatest statesmen and orators—the Right Honourable Mackenzie King, O.M. Yes, even he fell for my spiritualist three-card trick.'<sup>13</sup>

Roy's success with Canada's late Prime Minister is all the more astonishing as it was achieved during the last war, when the medium had not yet had a great deal of experience. But what Roy still lacked in technique was well out balanced by the fact that his sitter was no sceptic in spiritualist matters. A member of the Duke of Connaught's household arranged the times of Mr King's visits during his stays in London for discussions with the War Cabinet. When the Canadian Prime Minister came for the first time he did so incognito; all William Roy was told was that 'a distinguished person' would like to have a private seance.

The medium was puzzled. It was essential for him to have some idea who the caller would be: good preparation and information were the soul of his business. He looked up the Duke of Connaught in the reference books and found that the Duke, then over ninety years old, had been Governor-General of Canada from 1911 to 1916. And the most prominent Canadian believer in spiritualism was, as every medium knew, Mr Mackenzie King! The rest was routine for William Roy.

He was careful during that first séance with Mr King. There were no wires, no helpers in adjoining rooms, no 'materializations'; only a few 'spirit voices', which he could produce so well. Eventually, Mr King found himself talking to none other than Queen Victoria. 'Doing her voice was a bit of a strain,' admitted Roy, 'but it must have been a passable imitation.'

What did 'Her Majesty' talk about to the Prime Minister? That watch, of course, famous among spiritualists. In fact the Queen had given a gold watch to a Miss Georgina Eagle 'for her meritorious and extraordinary clairvoyance produced at Osborne House' in 1846.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> More on Mackenzie King, in this issue, see page 152:—*Did William Roy Fool Canada's Premier?*

<sup>14</sup> See *Psypioneer* Volume 1, No.15-16:—*Georgiana Eagle – Queen Victoria's Clairvoyant Revealed*, by Stephen Butt:—<http://woodlandway.org/PDF/15-16.PSYPIONEERFoundedbyLesliePrice.pdf>

After Miss Eagle's death it was inherited by an American medium, Etta Wiedt, who before her own death decided that the watch should be returned to Britain; she asked Mr King, who was given séances by her, to take the watch back. This he did, and gave it to the Duchess of Hamilton, who made a present of it to the Spiritualist Alliance. All this was common knowledge among mediums, but the Canadian Prime Minister was impressed by hearing the 'Queen' talk about her watch which he had brought back to England. At a subsequent séance Roy imitated what he believed the voice of Gladstone might have sounded like, speaking about 'these grave times for Britain and the Empire'. Mr King was extremely satisfied with him. Before he came again, Roy learnt up about Mackenzie King's family so that he could let the Premier's brother and sister 'talk' to him.

William Roy was never caught. Doctors, clergymen, investigators familiar with all the tricks of fake mediums and sceptical about Roy's powers tested him, but found nothing wrong. At a meeting at Bedford in 1948, one investigator, Brigadier R. C. Firebrace,<sup>15</sup> fastened a larynx microphone to Roy's neck. 'Any movement of the medium's larynx, any whisperings or motions of the throat would be picked up, amplified and come through a loudspeaker', reported the Brigadier. 'But no sound came from the loudspeaker.' Of course not; Roy found that the wires from the microphone to the amplifier ran between his legs, and by pressing his knees together he could pull the microphone away from his throat during his 'spirit voice' productions!

Another investigator had the idea, which we have already mentioned, of making Roy fill his mouth with coloured water so that he would be unable to speak, and any voice that might be heard must be a real spirit one. But Roy had prepared himself for the test. He had in his breast pocket a small phial with a rubber tube attached to it; through this he spat the dyed water into the phial, and sucked it up again after producing his 'spirit voices'. When sticking-plaster was put over his mouth by an investigating doctor, and both his hands tied to the arm-rests of the chair, he found it quite easy to lean over in the darkness until he could reach the plaster and loosen it with one of his tied hands.

His most faithful, though guiltless,<sup>16</sup> accomplices were his sitters, who unconsciously helped him if given the slightest lead. Once the vicar of Hampstead came to a sitting, and Roy, who had discovered that this clergyman had been a chaplain in Malaya, learnt the words for 'How do you do?' in Malay. He had hardly spoken them when the vicar jumped up and began to talk in rapid Malay into the spirit trumpet. Afterwards he explained that his 'spirit visitor' had been a member of a rajah's household whom he had known out there.

William Roy was, without doubt, a genius among the fraudulent mediums of our time. His safest protection was the unshakable faith of those whom he had made happy by 'bringing back' to them, if only for some fleeting moments, their beloved dead. He made only one major mistake: that of quarrelling with his assistant. It may have been merely a

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<sup>15</sup> More on Brigadier R. C. Firebrace in this issue, see page 156:—*William Roy Lies About "Test" Séance*

<sup>16</sup> See page 146:—*The Strange case of Katherine Hayward and Liebie Pugh*

clash of temperaments or a difference of opinion on some trivial matter; but it led to Roy's eventual self-exposure.

We do not know what has happened to him since. Perhaps he has changed to some other, more humdrum occupation, possibly in the electro-technical field in which he had shown himself a superb craftsman. Perhaps he is again a practising medium under some other name. But even the tainted one of William Roy would not, in his own opinion, bar him from further success with the spiritualists. 'I know,' he wrote with conviction, 'that even after this confession I could fill the séance rooms again with people who find it a comfort to believe I am genuine.'



### **The second account by Simeon Edmunds:—<sup>17</sup>**

The most sensational story of seance-room fraud in recent years is undoubtedly the case of William Roy. During the 1940s the spiritualist press made frequent favourable references to the work of this medium. A typical example appeared in *Psychic News* on December 6, 1947, where an account of one of his demonstrations began: 'Some of the finest evidence ever heard at a public meeting was witnessed at the Kingsway Hall on Saturday when William Roy gave a demonstration of the direct-voice.' Similar glowing reports appeared in the same paper on July 31, 1947, February 5, 1948, March 6, 1948, and March 5, 1949, to name a few specific dates. These reports commented on the wonderful 'physical' phenomena produced by Roy—particularly materialisation and the 'direct voice'—and also the amount of accurate information, including names, dates and addresses, contained in the messages he gave. By the middle 1950s he was certainly the best-known 'physical' medium then operating in this country.

In 1958 however Roy, like most physical mediums, was caught, and in a series of articles published in the *Sunday Pictorial*<sup>18</sup> he revealed in detail the methods by which he had produced his phoney phenomena. Besides illustrating the callous heartlessness of this medium and others of his ilk, this confession demonstrates that although fraudulent mediums of the old school find life difficult when investigators use modern scientific equipment, their up-to-date colleagues may well turn such apparatus to their own benefit.

At the start of the series, under the heading 'Unmasked', the *Sunday Pictorial* stated: 'Until his exposure. William Roy stood high in the esteem of thousands of devout believers in Spiritualism. The wealthy, the famous, as well as ordinary men and women in all parts of Britain, knew him as a medium whose apparent powers brought them comfort after the

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<sup>17</sup> *Spiritualism: a Critical Survey*, by Simeon Edmunds Aquarian Press, London 1966. Chapter Nine Fraud, pages 118-124.

<sup>18</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*, March 23, 30, April 6, 13, 20, 1958

death of their loved ones. But now—following accusations by the *Sunday Pictorial*—these “powers” are revealed as frighteningly clever trickery. They are revealed as a mockery of the dead which enabled this fake medium to fleece tens of thousands of pounds from people he fooled at seances.’

Beginning his confession, Roy said he feared it would ‘shock and distress the 100,000 and more people who came to my private and mass-audience seances and learned to regard me as one of the world’s most capable and trustworthy mediums . . . My victims were the dazed and grief-stricken people who believed that I could put them in touch with the spirits of their loved ones from the world beyond the grave.’

Before describing his methods Roy pointed out that ‘of all men and women, the most helpless and defenceless are those crushed by grief’. He admitted that his dupes included doctors, clergymen, journalists, Service chiefs, judges, and men entrusted with the future of great nations. In addition to netting about £50,000 he received expensive presents and even the favours of wealthy women. He went to some length to impress sitters with his own affluence. ‘I didn’t want them to think that they would be doing me any favours by slipping small cash into my hand.’

In addition to the usual tricks involving butter-muslin ectoplasm and collapsible reaching-rods to manipulate the trumpets in the dark, Roy was able to draw upon a useful working knowledge of radio and electrical engineering. He also kept elaborate card-index records of sitters and likely sitters. These contained information obtained at previous seances from the sitters themselves, from voters’ lists, from Somerset House, and from other mediums. ‘We phoney mediums traded information—like swapping stamps,’ he declared. A typical seance, attended by up to about twelve sitters, would be along these lines.

On arrival the sitters, most of whom women, would be asked to leave their coats and handbags in the hall. They were then shown into the seance-room. Before entering himself Roy would listen through a concealed microphone to their conversation, sometimes recording it so that information could be placed on his files for use at future seances. When he had heard enough he would take his place in the seance-room, ask for the lights to be turned off, and, as a radiogram played religious music, indicate, by heavy breathing, that he was going into a ‘trance’. Then he would begin to speak as a Red Indian spirit guide, telling the sitters that some of their loved ones were present and would soon attempt to speak.

Meanwhile a confederate would be busily examining the handbags and coat pockets for clues—letters, tickets, bills, notebooks, etc., and noting down his findings. Roy would play for time by waving a trumpet (a light cardboard or aluminium cone painted outside with luminous bands) around on the end of a telescopic tube and then speaking as loudly as he could (another spirit voice) through it. This was the get-ready signal to his confederate, who by then would be stationed with his notes in an adjoining room. Next Roy would slip a hearing aid earphone from his pocket and connect it up with what looked like an ordinary electrical wall-socket but was in fact wired to a similar socket in the next room which, in turn, led to an amplifier and a microphone.

In an actual case described by Roy the confederate told him over the microphone that one of the sitters, named Susan, composed songs, some of which had been sung at a celebrity concert in Cambridge. He also gave the address in that city where the sitter had formerly lived. Roy remembered that when she arrived he had asked the sitter whether she believed in spiritualism and that she had replied, 'No, but my mother was a believer', thus indicating that the mother was dead.

Assuming a new voice Roy said, 'A spirit wants to talk to her daughter', and gave the name, 'Susan'. He flicked the trumpet off the rod so that it fell to the ground and in the voice of the 'guide' said, 'This spirit is very weak and finds it hard to communicate. She says it is difficult to reach you since you left Cambridge.' He gave the name of the road where the sitter had lived and added that the mother was proud to know that her daughter's songs had been sung by a well-known singer. 'That,' said Roy, 'had a sensational effect. Yet just a few lines of a half-forgotten letter my confederate found in a pocket made it possible.'

Roy asserted that Red Indians are popular as guides 'because a simple, dead Indian would know little of our world.' Thus, when a tricky question was asked the 'guide' could reply, 'No can answer. Me just simple Indian.' Roy's own invented guide, to whom he gave the name 'Tinka', became familiar to many spiritualists through a portrait by a well-known 'psychic artist' who claims to draw spirit guides which he sees clairvoyantly. When told of Roy's confession that the guide was his own invention the artist, Frank Leah, insisted: 'Roy may be a trickster, but my drawing of his spirit guide, Tinka, is genuine.<sup>19</sup> I drew him from my own experience. He gave me a warning at the time against Roy, whom he described in the presence of three other experts as a fraud.' Here I think one may fairly ask, not only how an invented guide could be genuine, but why if genuine and knowing Roy to be a fraud he should continue to act as his guide?

By using the earphone as a miniature loudspeaker at the end of the telescopic rod and a trumpet, Roy would sometimes relay the voice of his confederate, at the same time speaking himself through another trumpet, thus producing the sensational and convincing phenomena of two spirit voices speaking together. To render this even more convincing he invented another 'guide', 'Dr Wilson'. Commenting on the success of this device Roy observed: 'This sensational revelation will ruin the Sunday breakfast of other "mediums" up and down the country who have told their sitters time and time again that their guides have talked to my guides.'

Much of Roy's success in duping quite critical sitters was due to his clever development of the microphone relaying technique whereby he was able to demonstrate the 'direct voice' in full light, an achievement quite beyond the capabilities of his rivals. To do this he ran wiring under the carpet from the microphone and amplifier to two brass tacks, the heads of which protruded through the carpet and were ostensibly securing it to the floor. He adapted the hearing aid as a miniature loudspeaker and attached it to his cuff, running wires from it up his sleeve, inside his jacket and down his trouser legs into his shoes. Here they

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<sup>19</sup> More on Frank Leah / Tinka in this issue, page 150:—*Is William Roy Overdoing It?*

connected through the soles with two metal plates, one on each shoe, so that when he stood on the tacks a circuit was completed and the confederate could produce voices from the loudspeaker.

Roy was nothing if not ingenious. On one occasion an investigator asked whether he would be willing to be tested by holding some coloured fluid in his mouth throughout a seance. Roy considered the matter for several days and then agreed to the test, which he passed with flying colours. He did it this way. A test-tube fitted with a length of rubber tubing was concealed in his pocket, and after filling his mouth with the fluid he waited until the lights were put out and then simply put the tube in his mouth, expelled the fluid into the test-tube, went through his act, and then, at the end, sucked the fluid back into his mouth. Needless to say, he practised this many times during the days when he was considering whether to accept the test.

Roy's electrical knowledge once got him through an even more difficult test. He was asked to produce a 'direct voice' which could be picked up by a microphone in a sealed box. This he agreed to do—in the dark. This time he equipped himself with two leads ending in small clip-on crocodile clips. When the lights were put out he attached these clips to the terminals on the outside of the box, thus connecting his own microphone in parallel with the enclosed one, through which the investigator assumed the voice was being picked up.

Neither of the investigators mentioned above seems to have been very competent. Any psychical researcher worthy of the name would certainly have insisted on much more stringent controls—particularly of the medium's hands—before attaching any significance to such tests.

The reaction of the spiritualist press to this exposure is interesting. In its first issue to appear after the story broke, March 1, 1958, *Psychic News* stated: 'To impose upon the bereaved is as shoddy a fraud as can be committed. If fake mediums are found they must be exposed to protect their sitters, genuine mediums and the good name of Spiritualism itself.' Immediately under this statement appeared an article by Percy Wilson, managing director of *Psychic News*, headed, 'How the Story was Revealed'. It began: 'Now that part of the story has been made public it is desirable, I think, that other facts should be told which, so far, have not been revealed.' Wilson went on to state (in spite of the glowing *Psychic News* reports already mentioned) that he 'first became aware of Mr Roy's activities through Mr Abdy Collins in the early '50s'. After some (unspecified) scientific investigation, the results of which were 'not at all reassuring', 'It was decided that mention of Roy should not be made in *Psychic News*.' In 1952 an associate of Roy took some apparatus, including microphones, shoes with copper plates and a miniature loudspeaker to the office of *Psychic News* and declared that he had been 'assisting Roy in producing extensive frauds on these lines'. A photograph of the apparatus, taken at the time, appeared alongside the article.

In view of the *Psychic News* statement that fake mediums must be exposed to protect sitters, etc., it seems pertinent to ask why there was a delay of more than five years before

these facts were revealed, and why they were not disclosed until after Roy had been exposed in another newspaper.

In fairness it must be noted that *Two Worlds*, the other leading spiritualist newspaper at that time, had denounced Roy, together with three other ‘physical’ mediums, Charles Basham Arthur Phillips and John Scammell, as fraudulent in 1955, and that Roy brought a lawsuit against the editor which he dropped when the final exposure came.

The career and downfall of William Roy is the outstanding example of modern scientific methods applied to fraudulent mediumship. Others, less well known, may well have used similar methods, and there is no disputing that even more convincing deceptions could be staged with the aid of newer electronic marvels such as miniature radio transceivers, ‘micro-bugs’ and similar devices.



There was considerable fall-out from the *Sunday Pictorial* articles in the Spiritualist Movement, as can be seen from the *Two Worlds* reports below:



## THE STRANGE CASE OF KATHERINE HAYWARD

*The Two Worlds*:—<sup>20</sup>

**WILL Mrs. Liebie Pugh, who is in charge of the White House, Surbiton, Surrey, continue to sponsor Roy’s seances?**

On the same day that Roy was confessing to Victor Sims of the “Sunday Pictorial,” “Of course I am a phoney,” people who had applied for 5s. tickets for Roy’s Kingsway Hall seances that she had organised received a strange circular signed by her.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Two Worlds* March 1, 1958 page 6.

## Guides advised it

This stated that Roy's public "voice seances" would be held on Thursday this week at Cobham, and continued to be held at the White House.

**Roy's withdrawal of his libel action against "Two Worlds," she added, "was made on the advice of Katherine Hayward's guides, in order that the White House work and William Roy's own mediumship could go forward in an atmosphere of love and goodwill to all men ...**

"After the guides had spoken, Katherine Hayward said to William Roy: 'We can go forward together and out to the world only in demonstration of love. Give up all bitterness—all thoughts of opposition and we will win through with love.'

"This is what Roy has done. We are proud to acknowledge the fact, to go forward with him and share his truly wonderful mediumship with the world at large."

## Superior phenomena

On Sunday, after she had seen Roy's confession of faking in the "Pictorial," she told an inquirer: "We have complete faith in Mr. Roy. All these accusations are a complete frame-up. "She added that the "Pictorial" article was merely a re-hash of "unfounded accusations" in *Two Worlds*.

A White House "bulletin" dated January, 1958 referred to "highly successful scientific experiments" taking place "through the combined mediumship of Katherine Hayward and William Roy."

This enabled them, it added, to witness a phenomenon called "crystallisations" said to be superior to materialisations. The "bulletin" said that one figure thus to show herself was Marie Therese, "the most trusted and loved of Katherine Hayward's controls."

On one occasion, after Marie Therese had so appeared, Mrs. Pugh said she consulted "Tinka (William Roy's great control)." "Tinka " explained how the "crystallisation" was produced by some finer vibration of manifestation."

Yet when Roy confessed to the "Pictorial" about his faking at seances, he boasted, "*I invented Tinka.*"

## STRANGE CASE OF LIEBIE PUGH

MY Sympathy in this Roy exposure goes out to Mrs. Liebie Pugh, whose sincerity cannot be questioned. Yet as recently as on Monday she still believed in Roy!

Nearly four years ago, when she still owned Wood Court Hotel, Cobham, Surrey, I warned her against being credulous and urged her to seek confirmation of the fantastic claims made to her at seances. She would not listen.

She told me how much money she had—it amounted to several thousands of pounds—and said that even if she spent it all and was found to be wrong, she would regard it as a valuable lesson.

Ever since, she has continued to finance psychic activities at Cobham and, after selling the hotel, at the White House.

She showed me, when I saw her nearly four years ago, a seven-page circular setting out a grandiose scheme which was going to help save the world. As part of this campaign, a cottage in the hotel grounds names the “Gold Room,” in which everything was coloured gold, would become the centre of their operations.

In it would be built “a spiritual structure,” from which would be sent out “rays of realisation to the whole universe.” And in the centre of the “Gold Room” this spiritual substance would be gradually solidified so that “the Masters can manifest themselves.”

The reason why Wood Court was chosen, said the circular, was because the ground on which it stood “is a very ancient and highly magnetic centre.”

### **“Masters” at work**

The “Gold Room” would be a “power house which will combat the threatening aspects of our world. During and after that successful counteraction of darkness by light, the Masters will use what is being formed for their deliberate manifestation to mankind, which is the prelude to the incoming age.”

Mrs. Pugh added in this circular: “I am quite ready for all to be proved illusory and myself misled. If this could in any inconceivable way turn out to be the case, I should welcome it completely, desiring only truth.

The circular said that members of the Wood Court group would travel on a world-wide scale “to bring these divine manifestations to all lands . . .

“The mediumship which is being developed in each member of our group is such that the Great Ones will be able to control us—not only at set times—but 24 hours out of the 24.”

After selling Wood Court Hotel, Mrs. Pugh has continued to finance all the activities from the White House.

## STRANGE CASE OF FRANK TURNER

**WHAT will Frank Turner do now? He has been one of the leading defenders of William Roy and, indeed, collected money to help him with the action for alleged libel that Roy has now dropped.**

In addition to frequently sending me scurrilous communications—"Nemesis will come" was one of the latest—he circularised people inviting them to learn "the other side of medium-persecutions. Be no longer hoodwinked by the commercialised Spiritualist press."

Yet all we were doing, at great expense to ourselves, was to defend an action brought by Roy, a self-confessed fraud.

Turner must have had a shock when he read Roy's confession in the "Pictorial." In his circular letter inviting people to contribute to the subscription list he had opened to meet Roy's "heavy costs" he referred to Roy's "great psychic gifts and complete honesty"

Subscribers, he said, would "doubtless welcome this opportunity to express in a practical form their gratitude for his courage in embarking on his fight for truth and justice, and exposing the long-persisting tyranny of a section of the organised Spiritualist movement and its popish over riding of the views and convictions of the majority of competent psychical researchers.

Contributions, said Turner, could be sent to him. He had headed the list with £50 "in appreciation of the blessings received through the gifts of this and other persecuted mediums."

Turner has not only championed Roy but also Arthur Phillips, another physical medium who has been exposed in fraud, and who was so named in our article of August 13, 1955, after which Roy issued his writ for alleged libel.

Turner's circular ended by describing how Sir Oliver Lodge, said to be a frequent materialised visitor, addressed Roy in person, saying "The work of the spirit world in spreading the truths of Survival will be greatly facilitated and your sufferings will not have been in vain."

As Turner was instrument in collecting money—and Roy has undertaken to pay our costs—what will he do now? He is confronted with Roy's confession of faking. Yet he has appealed for and obtained money on the plea that Roy was a genuine medium.

THE EDITOR

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IS WILLIAM ROY OVERDOING IT?

The Two Worlds:—²¹

BY THE EDITOR

IN 37 years' experience of Spiritualists I have not come across a bigger scoundrel, liar and faker than William Roy. But is he overdoing his confessing?

When a man reveals that he is a liar, the problem is: *How much of what he says can you believe?*

In the "Pictorial" Roy boasts of his faking. But in September, 1955, as part of his legal proceedings against *Two Worlds*, he swore an affidavit before a commissioner for oaths in which he stated:

"For over 10 years past I have worked as a professional medium. I have never acted as a medium other than in a genuine manner."

When Roy, at a meeting of the Spiritualist Council for Common Action, was confronted with the card index that his accomplice had produced, he resorted to lying. He said it was not used to provide information for his seances, which he admitted in this week's "Pictorial," but as material for a book on his mediumship.

Lies and truth

His confession on Sunday describes a room in his Golders Green bungalow as "expensively furnished." It was no different from thousands of similarly furnished rooms in suburban homes.

His car, a standard make, becomes a "gleaming" car. All his sitters arrived in "expensive cars" and were "well dressed."

Roy *is* telling the truth when he says in his confession. "To pick out the true from the false and contrived is like separating grains of sand from salt—in the dark."

In our issue of August 13, 1955, when I named him as one of four mediums exposed in fraud I wrote, "The situation is complicated by the fact that all or some of these men had, or still have, some genuine psychic power."

Does that apply to Roy? Or did he start with no psychic power and give only fake seances for 10 years?

Obviously, in his confession, he is trying to do as much damage to Spiritualism as he possibly can.

²¹ *The Two Worlds* March 29, 1958 page 3.

Like a Judas

Roy may imagine himself as a kind of Samson, trying to pull down the whole Spiritualist edifice, though a comparison with Judas is nearer the mark. When I told a well-known Spiritualist how much Roy was receiving for his confession, she replied, “Oh, I suppose that is what 30 pieces of silver would be worth today.”

Roy says that he invented “Tinka,” one of his “guides.” His confession states, “A psychic artist honestly believed he has sketched Tinka, but it cannot be MY Tinka, who was a mere invention.”

The psychic artist is Frank Leah, whose drawing was reproduced by the “Pictorial.”

“Roy may be a trickster,” said Leah in the caption, “but my drawing of his spirit guide, Tinka, is genuine. I drew him from my own experience. He gave me a warning at the time against Roy, whom he described in the presence of three other experts as a fraud.”

Leah did this drawing when a woman, a stranger, first telephoned him to ask for a sitting. Later she revealed that she was one of Roy’s Sitters.

Following his usual practice, Leah described on the telephone what he could see clairvoyantly, and made a sketch from which he drew a portrait when the woman visited him later at his studio. That was in 1948.

Was it Tinka?

About that time Leah was asked to attend a seance by Roy at which three other people were present. On this occasion, says Leah, he was addressed by the one claiming to be Tinka, who, speaking through Roy, told the artist that he had invited him to be present for a special reason.

He wanted to warn Leah that his medium was a trickster who preferred to work on his own as a fraudulent medium.

Was this a genuine communication? If it was a fake, why should Roy give himself away as a fraud when he was trying to make everyone believe he was a genuine medium?

Then there is the strange case of Liebie Pugh, who has organised seances for Roy with Katherine Hayward at her home, the White House, Surbiton, Surrey. She says that a group of about 10 experienced sitters obtained what they regard as genuine phenomena with a Roy.

“On one occasion in the presence of only three sitters,” she said on Monday, “a spirit materialised saying he was going to wake Roy up, as he wanted Roy to see him.

“He then brought Roy back to consciousness, grasped him by both his wrists, and drew him from his chair in the cabinet out into the room under the red light, so that we could see and hear Roy and the spirit form speaking to each other outside the cabinet at the same time.”

Where is Roy now? Nobody knows, not even the “Pictorial.”



DID WILLIAM ROY FOOL CANADA’S PREMIER?

*The Two Worlds:—*²²

**Fake medium’s story is full of loopholes
By the Editor**

THE trouble with a lying villain such as William Roy is that it is almost impossible to know when he is telling the truth. He boasts in this week’s “Sunday Pictorial” that he cheated William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada, with fake seances.

The question is: Did he ever give a sitting to Mackenzie King, or is Roy’s story sheer invention?

Roy says that he was asked to give a seance to “a distinguished person,” who was to visit him “under conditions of the greatest discretion.” by someone in the Duke of Connaught’s household.

Not knowing who the visitor was to be, he was worried because he was unable to look up his file and reference books which he used to “surprise” sitters with his knowledge.

Turning up a reference book he found that the duke had once been Governor General of Canada. He wondered if it was someone from Canada.

Visits kept secret

“The newspapers and the ‘Court Circular’ told me who of importance was in London,” he says. He hardly dared to believe that his check-up suggested Mackenzie King. Refusing to take any chances, he looked up Canada’s Premier in the reference books.

²² *The Two Worlds*, April 19, 1958. Front page & page 3.

That night, says Roy, when Mackenzie King stepped from his Daimler he knew he was right. This, and other séances, was supposed to have been held during one of the great Canadian statesman's visits to London to confer with Churchill.

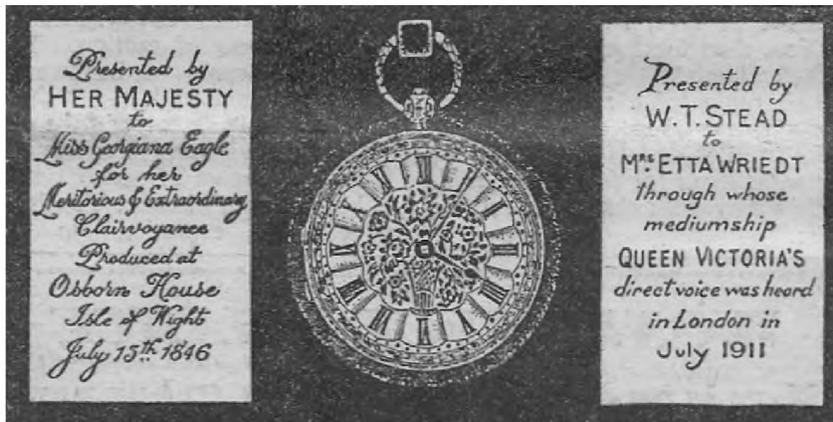
The simple fact, however, is that during the war the visits of Allied statesmen were kept secret. No mention was made of their being in Britain in newspapers or the 'Court Circular' until AFTER they had left the country. This was a simple precaution enforced by censorship. So Roy is lying.

For this first fake seance which he says he gave to Mackenzie King. Roy declares that he simulated the voice of Queen Victoria and that Mackenzie King believed he was talking to the "dead" Queen?

I don't believe it. Not even the world's greatest male mimic could produce a female voice that would carry conviction, especially to such a shrewd statesman as Mackenzie King.

What did I make the Queen say? "Roy adds. "She mentioned the watch that she gave to her faithful servant John Brown.

"This watch, for one reason or another, is always popping up at seances and is one of the 'old faithfuls' among mediums."



Here again is clear evidence that Roy is lying. Queen Victoria never gave the watch to which he refers to John Brown, who was one of her mediums. Roy, in his bragging to show how clever he was, has got the wrong story.

Queen Victoria *did* present a watch to a medium. As our illustration shows it was presented to "Miss Georgiana Eagle for her meritorious and extraordinary clairvoyance produced at Osborn House, Isle of Wight, July 15th, 1846."

Mackenzie King would have known at once that any reference at a Roy seance to Queen Victoria giving this watch to John Brown was a lie.

When Miss Eagle, the recipient off the watch, passed over, Queen Victoria asked W. T. Stead, the famous journalist and Spiritualist, to present it to the medium he considered the most deserving. He handed it to Etta Wriedt, the American voice medium.

In turn she asked Mackenzie King, who had had successful seances with her, to take it back to England when she passed on.

Then, says Roy, he produced the voice of Gladstone, “which was good enough to fool the Canadian Prime Minister, when I spoke of ‘these grave times for Britain and the Empire’.”

I don’t believe it. Mackenzie King in particular would have been suspicious of any “voice,” especially supposed to be emanating from Gladstone, which was unaware that it was no longer an Empire but a Commonwealth.

Mackenzie King, of all people, would know that Canada, like other Dominion countries, had become part of the Commonwealth of Nations since the Statute of Westminster of 1931.

“Not impressed”

For the second visit, said Roy, he had gathered so much useful information about Mackenzie King that he was able to produce, “using my repertoire of voices, his late father and also his brother and sister.” Roy says that the Canadian statesman was delighted with these efforts.

I don’t believe it. The person for whom Mackenzie King had the greatest devotion was his mother.

Another fact that punctures holes in Roy’s story is that Mackenzie King relied on his introductions to mediums on those recommended by his friends the Duchess of Hamilton and Miss Lind-af-Hageby. Neither of them knew Roy.

Miss Lind tells me that Mackenzie King discussed with them his seances with the four mediums they recommended, Gladys Leonard, Geraldine Cummins, Lilian Bailey and Helen Hughes. *He never once mentioned Roy.*

Roy also says that he gave a seance to Lord Dowding at which he faked the return of “a few departed RAF pilots” and also Dowding’s first wife. Asked by the “Pictorial” to comment, Dowding said:

“It may well be that Roy at one time did have some genuine power before he decided to use fraudulent methods. I was not terribly impressed with what I observed of him at the séance I attended.”

“Test séance”

Roy, however, does reveal how he faked a “test séance” with two London doctors which was reported by “Psychic News” on March 6, 1948. His wrists were tied to a chair and his mouth taped with sticking plaster.

At this séance he planted two stooges who moved the trumpets and were responsible for some of the voices. Pictures published on Sunday show how he slumped forward in his chair and pulled the plaster aside with one thumb.

The increase in his pulse beat, from its normal 72 to over 120, which was featured in the report, was easily done, he confesses. He took a lot of deep breaths very quickly and then held his breath as long as he could. An accelerated pulse beat was the result.

Gullible vicar

His greatest sensation, he assets, was when he “completely fooled” the Rev. Arthur Sharp, then Vicar of St. Stephen’s, Hampstead. In this connection it is worth mentioning that experienced Spiritualists regarded Sharp as very gullible because of the exaggerated claims he constantly made.

Having learned that Sharp had at one time been Chaplain to Sir Charles Brooke, the famous White Rajah of Sarawak, in Borneo, Roy guessed that the vicar would speak Malay. At one séance he trotted out, “How do you do?” in Malay.

The vicar was so excited that he jumped to his feet, grabbed the floating trumpet—luckily for Roy not catching hold of the telescopic rod by which it was attached to him—and began talking to it at a great rate in Malay. Afterwards the vicar reported that his “spirit visitor” was a member of the late Rajah Brooke’s household whom he had known 39 years earlier.

How he cheated

Roy adds that electrical knowledge that he picked up when he worked at Slough telephone exchanged helped him with other tricks with which he fooled sitters.

He tells of an occasion when the Rev. C. Drayton Thomas mentioned that one Spiritualist society was developing a microphone that could be sealed in a box. In case this was produced at one of his seances, Roy prepared himself.

When an investigator produced a sealed microphone he noticed that two terminals *outside* the box were not insulated. After the lights went out, he took from his pocket a length of wire and snap-on crocodile clips and a small microphone.

To cover the crackling noise he made as he fitted the clips to the terminals, he groaned, pretending to be in a trance. He was then ready to send “spirit voices” through the microphone tightly sealed up in the box.



WILLIAM ROY LIES ABOUT “TEST” SÉANCE

The Two Worlds:—²³

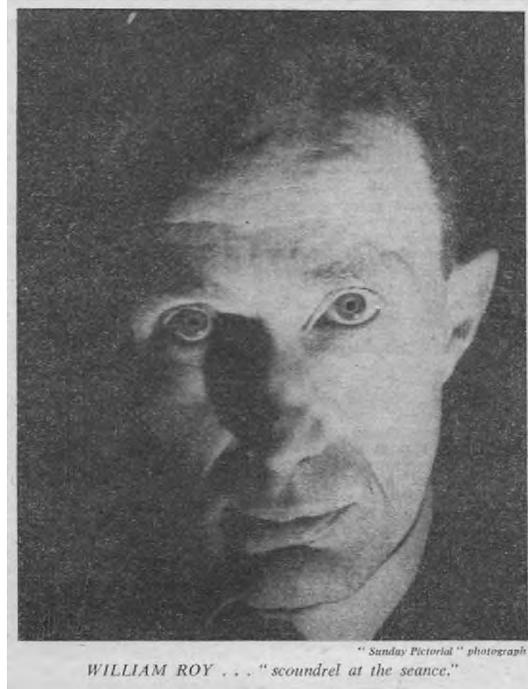
WILLIAM ROY LIED IN HIS VERSION, PRINTED IN THIS WEEK’S “SUNDAY PICTORIAL,” OF A “TEST” SEANCE HE GAVE TO BRIGARDIER R. C. FIREBRACE, PRESIDENT OF THE COLLEGE OF PSYCHIC SCIENCE.

For this “test,” says Roy in the last of his published confessions, he was to wear a throat microphone throughout the seance. If he even whispered, sensitive pads resting on his larynx would pick it up.

“A tape recorder would hold the damning evidence that would prove my spirit voice came, not from beyond the grave, but from my own throat.”

Dared not refuse

Though he trembled with nervousness, he dared not refuse to be tested. As the sensitive pads pressed on his throat he had a sudden inspiration. The wires to which were attached passed between his knees.



Even with his hands bound, says Roy, he could grip the wires with his knees and pull the microphone from his throat.

“With the pads only half an inch from my flesh, I gave a full performance of faked spirit voices. And not a single syllable was picked up by the microphone to appear on the tape recorder. I had scraped by.”

Firebrace told “Two Worlds” on Monday that there was no tape recorder used at this seance.

It was agreed that it should be the first of a series of six seances. As Roy had offered to be tested, Firebrace, following his usual practice, did not insist on full control of the medium and test conditions for the first sitting. He did not even bother to ask for the medium to be searched.

²³ *The Two Worlds* April 26, 1958 page 5.

Firebrace wanted to see what transpired at this preliminary séance so as to take the necessary precautions at the others. At the end of it, he was most suspicious of the results. Roy must have guessed, for he refused to give any more seances.

Held by two men

Roy claims to have succeeded when tested by Dr. Donald West of the Society for Psychical Research, but his account does not read like a success.

As the test began, Roy was tightly held by two men. Obviously, he says, he was not going to be able to slip forward and move, or float any trumpets around the room on this occasion.

Through baffled he went hopefully into his fake trance. At that moment, Dr. West, who had been outside, walked in. As West opened the door, he let light into the darkened seance room.

That, says Roy, was his big chance, because light is supposed to be physically harmful to genuine mediums. He slumped to the ground and feigned injury. When he recovered from his “shock” he said he could not continue.

Roy says that, despite his confessions, there will still be people who refuse to believe that he is a fake. “I know I could fill seance rooms again with people who find in a comfort to believe I am genuine,” he asserts.



Sequel to William Roy's Confessed Frauds

The Two Worlds:—²⁴

BY THE EDITOR

WILLIAM George Holroyd Plowright, alias William Roy, has defaulted on his solemn undertaking.



This is the latest chapter in the squalid psychic career of a self-confessed scoundrel, swindler, liar and rogue, who boasted that he made £50,000 by his “ingeniously, fiendish” means of faking seances.

My exposure last February in *Two Worlds* of his cold-blooded trickery was followed by Roy writing his confessions in the “Sunday Pictorial.” After denying to other newspapers that he had faked seances, Roy willingly agreed to “tell all” in the “Pictorial,” if he was paid to do so!

He boasted how he deliberately deceived grief-stricken mourners who came to his seances hoping for consolation. There can be few crimes worse than battenning on the bereaved.

I am proud of the leading part that *Two Worlds* played in ruthlessly removing this charlatan from the Spiritualist scene.

It is three years since I first named Roy in our columns as a fraudulent medium. He issued a writ for alleged libel.

Roy had no difficulty in swearing an affidavit that he had never acted other than as a genuine medium!

Because of the writ, for two and a half years no comments could be made about Roy in *Two Worlds* while the law took its course.

Naturally he saw our legal defence, with its details of witnesses who were prepared to describe in court how they had been tricked at Roy's seances.

²⁴ *The Two Worlds* August 23, 1958, page 3.

Where is he?

Finally he abandoned his lawsuit, in the only way possible—by giving an undertaking to pay our taxed costs. He has defaulted on this undertaking. His own solicitors are kept in ignorance of his whereabouts.

Two Worlds is now liable for these costs, which amount to £1,130.15s.5d (approximately \$3,400).

Our exposure of William Roy was dictated by two considerations—to rid our movement of fraud and to safeguard the public, especially the bereaved. It was a distasteful duty, but it had to be done, whatever the cost.

I now appeal to Spiritualists throughout the world to contribute to these costs so that *Two Worlds* should not be out of pocket. I know that I will not appeal in vain.

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Another story comes to light by ex-Chief Detective Inspector Percy Smith on “The Great Swindlers.”

## **FAKE MEDIUM CHEATED HER OF £15,000**

**Ex-Scotland Yard Chief Reveals Swindle By William Roy**

*The Two Worlds*:—<sup>25</sup>

### **“TWO WORLDS” REPORTER**

**A HITHERTO unprinted story of how William Roy, the fake voice medium, swindled one of his victims, a widow, of £15,000 was printed in the “London Evening News” last week.**

It is published in one of a series by ex-Chief Detective Inspector Percy Smith on “The Great Swindlers.”

The story in all its detail is known to me because I interviewed the widow after *Two Worlds* had received a writ for alleged libel from Roy because we had printed the fact that he was a fraud.

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<sup>25</sup> *The Two Worlds*, January 23, 1960. Front page and page 8, reporter unknown, Phillip Paul?.

## Fled abroad

He was allowed to withdraw the case against us after he had undertaken to pay the heavy costs. But he defaulted and fled the country. Roy, in his confessions printed in the “Sunday Pictorial,” boasted of how he had made £50,000 from his fake seances.

The woman, who realised how foolish she had been in her association with Roy, begged me not to print her story or her name. The ex-Scotland Yard official still has not told all the facts.

He describes this case as “one of the most heartless and vicious confidence tricks in my experience.” He says “it was worked upon a well-off woman who had lost both her husband and a son and was anxious to contact them through Spiritualism.”

The ex-detective says she was approached by a medium “well publicised at the time”—Roy’s name is never mentioned in the article. “We knew him as a trickster who had already been convicted for frauds,” he tells readers.

At the time we exposed Roy we knew of his prison record, but made no reference to it because it was not considered strictly germane.

## Accomplice planted

Soon, says Percy Smith, the widow was attending his private seances “in a well-appointed London house.” This was the suburban home, with no outstanding furnishings, in Golders Green. He says that the fees were ten guineas for a sitting, but this is an exaggeration.

In her case, the story goes on, Roy planted a female confederate in the hotel where she lived. They became acquainted. Soon they were exchanging intimate details of their lives “as women will.”

**This information was transmitted as “spirit messages” by Roy and impressed the widow who “thought her loved ones were standing by and trying to help her through problems.”**

The writer then tells, as already been reported in our columns, how Roy’s house was fitted with electrical and radio apparatus which were cunningly used at his sittings.

The ex-detective errs when he states that women when they arrived were told to leave the coats in a room and their handbags “in cupboards fitted with separate locks and retain the keys.”

Later, he says, an accomplice opened with a master key the various handbag lockers and transmitted information about the handbags’ contents to Roy in the seance room by a miniature radio system.

There were no cupboards with fitted separate locks. The door of the room was locked, but the accomplice had the key and transmitted the information which he found in handbags and men's overcoat pockets.

There follows a description of how Ray and his accomplice faked the "messages."

In time," says the writer, "Roy began to make romantic approaches to his victim" though he was a married man. He assured her that he wanted to obtain a divorce and marry her. She was hesitant to re-marry but was flattered.

Roy then got his accomplice at her hotel to persuade the widow to attend a seance with another fake medium through whom came "a startling message." This was that her "departed ones" advised her to offer Roy's wife £15,000, which they were certain she would accept to free her husband. The widow was told all this was for her happiness.

### **Roguish cunning**

Impressed by this alleged spirit advice coming through what she I thought was a strange medium who knew nothing about the other communications. she hurried to Roy in great excitement to tell him of the "confirmation."

He appeared to be overwhelmed at this news, cunningly intimating that his wife had long wanted to go abroad and open a business. He believed, he said, that she would accept this money to give him his release, so that she could start afresh in another part of the world.

The ex-detective does not relate—he may not know it—another aspect of this swindle. When the widow expressed doubt that Roy's wife would really agree to such an arrangement, he produced a letter, allegedly signed by his wife, written on a West End firm of solicitors' notepaper, in which her consent was given.

**Later the widow discovered that no such firm of solicitors existed. Roy had even faked the notepaper, which he specially had printed for the occasion.**

Anyway, so successfully was she duped, stage by stage, that eventually it was arranged for her to draw £15,000 from her bank and pay it over to Roy. This was done.

A few days later she and Roy went away for a joint holiday. What the writer calls their "belated 'honeymoon' " ended when news came that Roy's wife had committed suicide by gas poisoning.

At the inquest and later proceedings it was proved that she was practically penniless and in great distress at Roy's desertion. All the money paid over by the widow had gone into Roy's pocket. The wife had merely been palmed off with a few pounds.

There followed a distressing scene. The widow asked a taxi driver to take her to Scotland Yard, whereupon Roy, the crook, made himself scarce. It was, Smith says, a very chastened woman who unfolded her story at the Yard.

At first she was fully prepared to prosecute Roy for obtaining £15,000 from her by fraud. Later, says the ex-detective, she changed ed. her mind—she was in fact persuaded by Roy to drop the charge. So she told the Yard that she had second thoughts and would not invite publicity.

As the writer says, the hands of the police were tied. A charge of this kind demanded a prosecutor, and without the essential witnesses proceedings could not be instituted. So Roy escaped another conviction.

The ex-detective mentions that Roy and his accomplice went to South Africa, where they tried similar frauds. “But apparently they were an successful,” he says. “When last heard of they were practically without a penny.”

The writer makes this comment: “Women are usually the victims of the few ‘con men’ who enlist the aid of phoney Spiritualism to defraud them. Their emotional natures make them far more likely to fall for the blandishments of a man who adds to charm and good looks the ‘gimmick’ of being able to contact the departed.”



Over ten years later there was a sensational development in this story, as recalled below:

## **SELF-CONFESSED FAKE MEDIUM WILLIAM ROY WORKS AS BILL SILVER**

**Beatles went to his séance  
By the Editor**

*Psychic News:—*<sup>26</sup>

**I LEARNED** last week that under the assumed name of “Bill Silver,” the self-confessed fake medium, “William Roy,” who boasted in print that he extracted £50,000 from the bereaved and the gullible, has been giving “direct voice” sittings regularly in London for the past five years.

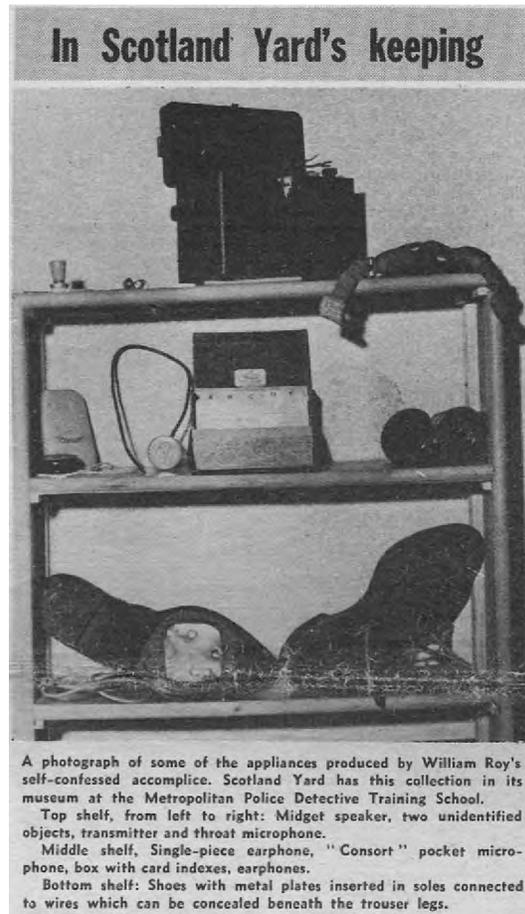
**William George Holroyd Plowright, 57,** who is using the “Bill Silver” alias, has been receiving at least £50 a week for his sittings. His chief sponsor, a very wealthy man, has known for some time, as have some regular sitters, that “Silver” is “Roy”.

Some sitters assert that the results, including “voice communications” from entities living on Venus, are genuine.

The Beatles have attended one or more of these sittings. But they have made no public comment as to whether they accept that their communications came from their “dead” manager, Brian Epstein.

Clairvoyant Tom Corbett, who has been present at sittings, was amazed when I told him last week that “Silver” is “Roy.” He said:

“I didn’t know that. I have been a dozen times. I have taken people who have got excellent evidence. There were even two or three voices at the same time. I would describe these experiences as super.”



<sup>26</sup> *Psychic News* May 24, 1969 (Front page).

Rumours that Roy had resumed his sittings, despite a pledge not to do so, came occasionally to *Psychic News* during the past few years.

### **Exposed as a fraud**

In “Two Worlds” for August 13, 1955, I named Roy as one of four mediums who had been exposed in fraud, but were still giving sittings. A writ for alleged libel was served by Roy’s solicitors.

My defence was justification. I engaged counsel and did everything in my power to get the case into court. Naturally while the case was *sub judice* I could not comment on it or on Roy’s continuing activities. And it was *sub judice* for two, and a half years!

I had witnesses ready to give evidence of his seance cheating. I was going to produce in court some of the appliances (reproduced on this page) which Roy and a confederate used for faking the seances.

These appliances, since deposited with Scotland Yard, were supplied by the accomplice. He also produced a box with card indexes kept by Roy, with information, about people who were regular sitters, and those he hoped would come.

**This was early in 1952. Roy was then told by a group of leading Spiritualists that they were going to publish all these facts. He pleaded it was unnecessary to do so. He undertook to leave Britain, go to South Africa and not give any more sittings.**

Roy went to South Africa, but did not stay very long. On his return to England, he resumed practising as a voice medium.

Because he had broken his pledge, I decided it was my duty to write the article naming him in “Two Worlds” in 1955, warning newcomers, and especially bereaved ones, who might not know about his fraudulent activity.

It was not until February, 1958, that I could publish the whole story of Roy’s trickery. I had to wait until he abandoned his lawsuit in the only way possible, by undertaking to pay my taxed costs amounting to £1,130 by 24 equal monthly instalments. He never paid a farthing.

**One document in his action for alleged libel was his signed, sworn affidavit before a commissioner for oaths that he had never practised fraud. This perjury did not bother him.**

On February 23, 1958, the “Sunday Pictorial” (now the “Sunday Mirror”) printed his statement, “Of course I am a phoney.” This was after he denied to other newspapers that he had faked seances.

## **£50,000 from seances**

The next month he agreed to “tell all” in the “Pictorial,” if he were paid. This, “the confession of William Roy,” was published in five instalments. In them he admitted he was a scoundrel and swindler, and boasted he had made £50,000 by his “ingeniously fiendish” methods of faking seances.

**He wrote, “My victims were the dazed and grief-stricken people who believed that I could put them in touch with the spirits of their loved ones from the world beyond the grave.”**

Roy confessed how he prepared for cheating by “studying my card-index system and the minutely documented books I kept on my sitters.”

He boasted that “I was making as much as £200 a week” and also received “expensive presents” that included a new car. All this came “out of the pockets and purses of the gullible.”

Roy described in detail how, with his confederate’s aid, he faked two voices speaking simultaneously. He told how, apart from his card indexes, he obtained information by “private snooping.” This included examining voters’ lists, visiting Somerset House for death and birth certificates and gleaning a wealth of facts from wills.

Roy disclosed, in detailing the microphones, earphones and other apparatus he used for trickery, that some of his electrical knowledge was picked up “when I worked at Slough (Bucks.) telephone exchange.” He also used to be a “telephone wire man” and once had an electrical and wireless shop.

**Roy’s series ended with these words: “Even after this confession, I know I could fill seance rooms again with people who find it a comfort to believe I am genuine.”**

By the time his series appeared Roy had left the country. This is the background of “Bill Silver”.

Will he be prosecuted under the Fraudulent Mediums Act? Guilty persons can be jailed for two years and also be fined £500.

Will he be charged with perjury, for which the maximum penalty is seven years’ imprisonment, a fine, or both? Under oath he made a false declaration that he had never acted other than as a genuine medium. And what will Scotland Yard do?

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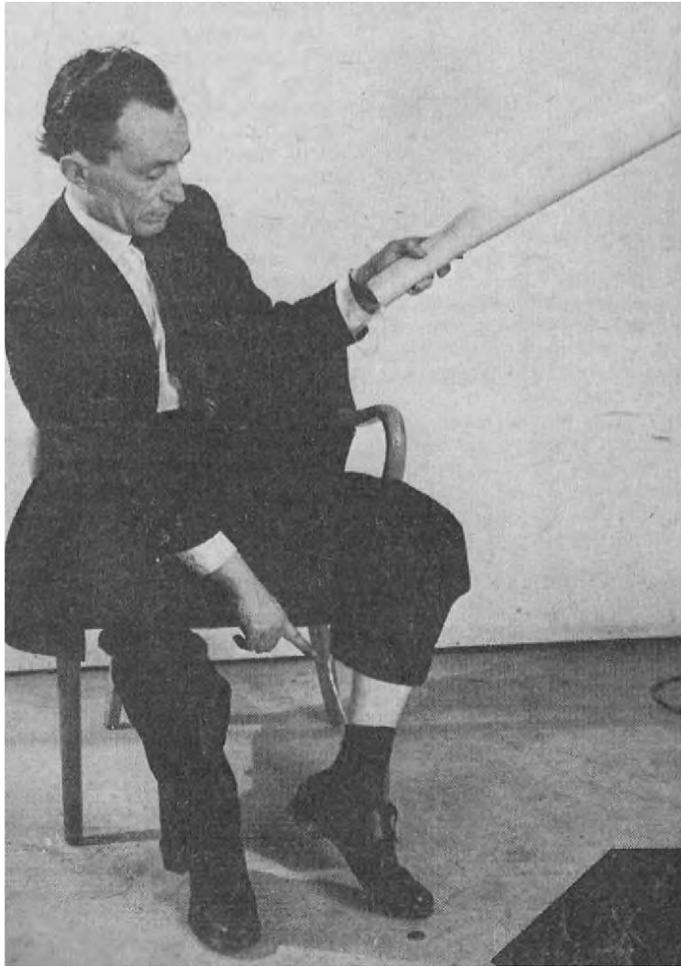
But this was not the end of the story, as *Psychic News* reported the following week:

‘I LIED ABOUT FAKE SEANCES’ WILLIAM ROY TELLS NEWSPAPER

Psychic News:—²⁷

WILLIAM ROY, self-confessed fraudulent medium, made another “confession” this week to a Sunday newspaper. He told “News of the World” that the five-part series, published by the “Sunday Pictorial” (now “Sunday Mirror”) in 1958, was “a pack of lies.”

The newspaper interviewed him after *Psychic News* revealed last week that Roy was back in Britain and giving seances again under another name: **Bill Silver.**



Now 57, with grey hair, Silver lives at The Village, Charlton, London, S.E. He claimed to have made £50,000 from fake seances.

Silver told “News of the World” reporter David Roxan: “I want to forget the past. My public confession of cheating the public by faking seances was a pack of lies. I said it for the money.”

The newspaper commented:

“The activities of Bill Silver are being watched closely by the Spiritualist newspaper *Psychic News*. A spokesman said: ‘It’s possible that Silver’s present psychic activities are genuine but the public have a right to know that he is the man who duped hundreds of people at faked seances.’

²⁷ *Psychic News* May 31, 1969 (Front page) Photograph:—William Roy points to the wire concealed in his trouser leg, which ran to an amplifier in the trumpet in order to produce “spirit voices”

“We don’t believe his confession in 1958 was a pack of lies. He wrote it only after his accomplice had come to us and revealed how the seances were being faked. He also brought the props to us’.”

Those props are now in the museum of Scotland Yard’s Detective Training School.

Silver told the newspaper: “I’m now engaged in sessions with other mediums because I’m deeply interested in psychical research. They all know I was William Roy, but that doesn’t affect their attitude towards me. They accept me.”

When *Psychic News* informed Tom Corbett, the clairvoyant, who is a regular sitter at Silver’s circle, that the medium was really William Roy he was amazed. He had not been told.

Silver also told Roxan: “I’m not making any money out of these sittings. This is just research for research’s sake.”

Last week PN revealed that Silver has been receiving “at least £50 a week for his sittings.” His chief sponsor is a very wealthy man.

He breaks promise

Silver promised Roxan that he would contact him the day after the interview and tell him the names of other mediums who were involved in the seances. He did not do so.

In his new confession to a Sunday newspaper, Silver said he wrote the articles about fraudulent mediumship because he was desperate for money.

“At least 90 per cent of what I wrote was lies. I knew the price I was paying was the destruction of my professional character. So when the articles appeared I made sure I was out of the country.

“In the next few years I had many jobs in many countries. I ran a bar in Tangiers and drove a lorry in Morocco for instance. Then I decided to come back.

“I’m prepared to swear that in the past 11 years I haven’t earned a penny from my psychic activities. I meet with other well-known mediums at various houses in London. We invite many famous people, including Royalty, to attend. Three Beatles, George Harrison, John Lennon and Ringo have been. I think they were interested in getting in touch with Brian Epstein, their late manager. They were moderately successful.”

'In touch with Venus'

Silver's "confession" continued: "Though I want to forget the name of William Roy, some people are determined I shouldn't. In particular, the wife of a wealthy and famous man who is stirring up mud against me. She is acting viciously because she believes I have information which I won't reveal that would help in her pending divorce action."

Silver, during his days as William Roy, drove a Jaguar. He still drives the same make of car.

The names William Roy and Bill Silver are both aliases. His real name is William George Holroyd Plowright. In addition to "spirit voices" at his present seances, his circle also receives communications from Venusians!

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**In all the above articles Maurice Barbanell was editor, unless stated.**

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See:—Stewart Alexander's book review, *Stewart Alexander's Journey* by Leslie Price Psypioneer Volume 6, No.11 pages 294-296:—  
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