

**PSYPIONEER  
JOURNAL**

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**Plans for FOTA are maturing fast, and we hope to provide the  
promised update in our next issue. LP.**

# Ronald Edwin Cockersell

## Fraudulent Medium – Genuine Psychic?



In the last *Psypioneer*, we noted fraudulent mediums of the past, on some of whom *Psypioneer* had previously reported. In the same issue we published two articles on the physical mediumship of Charles Basham, one positive and the other negative. We also pointed out that the editors of the leading journals would once name and shame mediums caught in fraud. For example in 1955 Maurice Barbanell published the names Charles J. Basham, Arthur Philips, William Roy, and John Scammell; there were numerous others.

Some claims are of course denied by the medium, and are defended by their supporters; others are cleared of the accusations made against them. Some claim unconscious fraud.<sup>1</sup> There are also the mediums who confess and tell their stories of deceit, revealing their tricks, like William Roy and later in 1976 Lamar Keene. A former Camp

Chesterfield medium, he confessed to fraud in his story told by Allen Spraggett (foreword by William V. Rauscher), *The Psychic Mafia*.<sup>2</sup> We find the familiar tactics of collection of personal data, and information interchanged with other fraudulent mediums, having been taken during services or séances when congregation and sitters are asked to provide their full name, the names of loved ones they wish to contact, and questions they wish to ask, coat pockets searched etc.

I will briefly mention a medium called Munnings, whose full name was Frederick (Fred) Tansley Munnings, and who had numerous allegations made against him, including court cases. For example in 1928, *The Daily Sketch* exposed him, which resulted in a court case. The paper described his fraud in various places, such as:

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<sup>1</sup>.—Conscious or unconscious fraud? Do mediums consciously premeditate fraud or is the fraud carried out unconsciously by *low* mischievous spirits. Some will argue that the medium premeditated the fraud and is therefore conscious and responsible for their actions; whilst others would say that due to the influence of *low* mischievous spirits, or of the sitters in the séance, the medium is totally unaware of their actions as they are in a somnambulistic state and therefore cannot be accountable for their *unconscious* actions. For example: In August 1877 Catherine (Kate) Elizabeth Wood (1854-1884) was headlined “Miss Wood Caught Personating a Spirit.” The report states: “During the unconscious state the medium is made the victim of the circumstances by which she is surrounded, and either through the perverted action of some of her own controls, or the intrusion of other spirits, she is reduced to the disgraceful position in which she was found.” See *Psypioneer*:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP8.2February2012.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>.—A short You-tube clip on the Camp Chesterfield Exposure - Lamar Keene, is available see:—<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLzwzYziubl>

“The particulars of the defence set out that in April 1919, at Portsmouth, Munnings was found by local Spiritualists to have secreted a pair of rubber gloves in his clothing in order that he might produce the soft touch which was declared by mediums to be characteristic of spirits. He was publicly denounced by the Spiritualists of Portsmouth and requested to leave the town”.

He then moved on to Hastings, where he continued to practise as a medium under an assumed name of Gaulton. We can note in *Light*, dated November 18th, 1922, warnings were given from Hastings Christian Spiritualist Society:

“ ... all Societies to refrain from giving Mr. Munnings any engagements for séances, and also to request them to abstain from lending him money on whatever plea he may put forward.”

This published warning was with full approval of the Munnings family. Interestingly Miss Beatrice E. Gaulton, the same name that Munnings was now using, writes the article; it appears Beatrice was Fred Munnings wife’s daughter (possibly by a previous marriage). In 1926, an article appeared in *Empire News*, this was republished in *Light* on April 3rd of that year, Ernest Oaten stated:

“His attitude towards Munnings is that whether that person possesses any mediumship whatever is questionable, but that he is guilty of deliberate fraud in the seance room is beyond doubt. Mr. Oaten writes, “I unhesitatingly characterise him as a charlatan.”

In 1928, Munnings, “confessions” were published in a well-known Sunday paper, showing how he duped many hundreds of people.

In the last issue, we stated we would cover the story of the self-confessed fraudulent medium Ronald Edwin Cockersell, whose photographs taken by Leon Isaacs caused a sensation at the time.

The information which is republished below is taken from *Clock Without Hands*, by Ronald Edwin, unless otherwise stated. Until just prior to the publication in 1955 by Sidgwick and Jackson, London, the author had been known as Ronald Edwin Cockersell, but changed his name by deed-poll to Ronald Edwin. The book made sensational headlines, for example the *Two Worlds* front page on December 10th: “I HAVE BEEN A FAKE MEDIUM” —confesses Ronald Edwin (Cockersell) TELLS HOW HE RIGGED CHEESECLOTH “SEANCES.”

*“E.S.P., as scientists usually call it, is simply the ability to perceive the past and foresee the future. To live with it is like being caught in a time-machine, in which all sorts of time are present at once—a clock without hands.”*

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## Ronald Edwin Cockersell 1914 – 1968

Cockersell was born on December 26th 1914 at Harwood Road, Fulham.<sup>3</sup> He had two older brothers Fred and Percy, Ronald was born ten years after the youngest of his older brothers. They were raised in poverty, with family quarrels motivated by his father's violent temper and drinking. After his father served a six-month prison sentence at Wormwood Scrubs for stealing pianos from his work place, the Cockersells took up residence at Hazlebury Road, Fulham. After this episode Ronald for the next few years started sleepwalking, and as it stopped, when he was around nine years old, he became conscious of what he would always term as E.S.P.

Around 1926, just after his eleventh birthday his mother, aged forty-two, died of chronic asthma. His two elder brothers were earning their living, so Ronald's father decided to put him in the Bisley Home for Boys, an orphanage run by Shaftesbury Homes. During this period Ronald's E.S.P. deserted him altogether and, with its departure, the sleepwalking returned. Just over a year later, his father took him back home, where he found he now had a stepmother called Ethel. He returned to school for a year, then at the age of fourteen he set out for work. It was sometime during this period his E.S.P., was to return. Ronald became involved with an older woman called Fanny. Following a séance, she became convinced of his psychic ability and through her advice, he went to Fulham Spiritualist Church. In those days, it was situated in Lettice Street; today the church is in Kelvedon Road.<sup>4</sup>

It would be from this platform that seventeen year old Cockersell started his Spiritualist career; and it was here (he claimed) he demonstrated his E.S.P. for the first time outside his circle of friends, etc. Cockersell's understanding of E.S.P. was that it "... is a basic psychic faculty." If we are to accept his account, he possessed an impressive *psychic faculty*, which he was able to access without consciously seeking it. The church council were less impressed with Cockersell's psychic ability or with his cocky presentation – he

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<sup>3</sup>.—His birth date December 26th 1914 (age 34), is taken from his "Border crossing information Canada to Buffalo, New York arrival date July 15th 1949.

<sup>4</sup>.—Fulham Spiritualist Church was founded in 1902, according to their website; the Church moved to their present location at Kelvedon Road in 1931. The building was originally called St. Markus Kirche (St. Mark's Church) a Lutheran Church. See:—<http://www.jean-way.de/spiritualistchurch.aspx>

or his ability did not conform to the usual Spiritualist practice of that time. Cockersell moved on, soon taking the platform at Wimbledon. The then Vice-President of Fulham Spiritualist Church, had previously warned him to slow down, and it was during his weekly Wimbledon demonstrations he claimed “a heightened state of awareness,” and found himself going into trance. This had a bad effect on him, perhaps because he started too early, or perhaps due to him not understanding the true nature of his claimed psychic faculty, but whatever the reason, its effect caused a nervous breakdown.

Below are a few quotes from *Clock Without Hands* pp. 31-32:

“The mind is very resilient in the ’teens. Before long, I seemed to have recovered completely and I plunged more and more deeply into spiritualism. I believe, however, that I did not become fully myself again until very much later—not until I had finally decided to give up spiritualism and regard my gift more objectively.

“My first paid engagement was at the Stratford Temple of Light. I received seven-and-six for an evening’s clairvoyance. This was followed by other occasional engagements, and I was looking for more. I wrote to the Marylebone Spiritualist Association and went to see Frank Hawken,<sup>5</sup> their secretary. He in turn introduced me to Mrs. St. Clair Stobart.<sup>6</sup> This grand old lady of spiritualism, who died recently,<sup>7</sup> was kind but autocratic. She had an incredible history, and during, the First World War had led the retreat of the Serbian army, mounted on a black horse.

“At this time, she was on the look-out for young psychic talent for her meetings at the Spiritualist Community, Grotrian Hall, in Wigmore Street.<sup>8</sup> The object for which she worked untiringly was to persuade the Church of England, as she put it, “to weld indissolubly together and accept *in toto* the claims of spirit return through spiritualism”.

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<sup>5</sup>.—Frank W. Hawken: The Association’s first full-time secretary, a position he held from 1930 to 1943 upon his death. The Marylebone Spiritualist Association (MSA) founded in 1872 – today this Association is known as the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain (SAGB):—<http://www.spiritualistassociation.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup>.—Mrs. St. Clair Stobart has numerous references in *Psypioneer* which can be located by the search engine at [www.woodlandway.org](http://www.woodlandway.org) We can note she represented the Spiritualist Community on July 1st 1930’s, Parliamentary Deputation to the Home Office (this was the last service by Conan Doyle to the Movement, as he passed on 7 July). The work of the “Confraternity” (unite Spiritualism and the Churches) see *Psypioneer* [http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP4.pdf](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP4.pdf)

<sup>7</sup>.—Mrs. Mabel Annie St. Clair Stobart died in a nursing home at Bournemouth in December 1954 age 92; in the next issue of *Psypioneer* we will give further information on her adventurous life.

<sup>8</sup>.—With Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s death in July 1930, Hannen Swaffer followed him as President of the Spiritualist Community, which is said to own the Grotrian Hall. Swaffer at this time was also a Vice-President of the MSA. He had also been elected Hon. President of the Spiritualists’ National Union in the body, with Sir Arthur continuing as Hon. President in spirit.

“She liked me and we got on well together. She was the only spiritualist who thoroughly approved of my sense of humour and unconventional approach to clairvoyance. In the end, however, I overdid the humour and even Mrs. Stobart was shocked. As a result of the first séance, I had been invited to appear regularly at the Grotrian Hall and I continued to get good results. Finally, I received some E.S.P. for one lady in the hall concerning her dead brother. “He died tragically. In fact it was a case of ‘missionary à la carte’.” I told her. It was true enough: her brother had been a missionary and had been killed by bushmen in Africa. For this exhibition of very bad form, I was quite rightly condemned by all and was not asked to produce clairvoyance there again. This was a pity as I had been paid a guinea an appearance and I had genuinely enjoyed the meetings.

**SPIRITUALIST COMMUNITY  
GROTRIAN HALL**  
115 WIGMORE STREET, W.I.

President: HUNTER SWAFFER      Chairmen and Leader: Mrs. ST. CLAIR STOBART      Hon. Treasurer: H. B. SUTTON  
Secretary: Miss F. V. GREGORY, M.B.E.      Telephone: 6814 WELBECK

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 16th, 1936.**

11 a.m.—Mr. RONALD MCGORQUODALE  
Clairvoyante: Mrs. Helen Spiers.

6.30 p.m.—Rev. C. DRAYTON THOMAS  
Clairvoyante: Mrs. Stella Hughes.

Sunday, February 22nd, at 11 a.m. ... Mr. H. ERNEST HUNT  
Clairvoyant: Mr. Thomas Wyatt.

Sunday, February 23rd, at 6.30 p.m. ... Major C. C. COLLEY  
Clairvoyante: Mrs. Helen Spiers.

*Silver Collection on entry.*

**OPEN MEETINGS**

Monday, 6.30 p.m. ... Wednesdays, 12.30 p.m.  
Organ Recital, Address, Questions Answered and Clairvoyance. Admission Free

Monday, February 17th.—Speaker: Miss Petronella Nell  
Clairvoyant: Mr. George Dunsley.

Wednesday, February 19th.—Speaker: Mr. H. Ernest Hunt  
Clairvoyante: Miss Lily Thomas

**WEEKDAY ACTIVITIES**

**Monday.**  
2.30—4 p.m. Mrs. Livingstone, by appointment.  
2.30—4 p.m.—Mrs. Bird's Ladies' Healing Circle. For appointments write to Mrs. Moysey (Hon. Secretary).  
2.30—4 p.m.—Mrs. St. Clair Stobart welcomes enquirers.  
6.30 p.m.—Open Meeting in the Grotrian Hall.  
7.45 p.m.—Mrs. Bird, Circle for Trance Diagnosis and for Instruction of potential healers.

**Tuesday.** Mrs. Livingstone, by appointment.

**Wednesday.** 12.30—1.30 p.m.—Open Meeting in Grotrian Hall.  
2.30—4 p.m.—Mrs. St. Clair Stobart welcomes enquirers.  
6 p.m.—Mrs. Bird's Ladies' Healing Circle. For appointments write to Miss Robertson, Hon. Sec.

**Thursday.** Miss Lily Thomas, by appointment.

7 p.m.—Mrs. Bird's Mixed Healing Circle. For appointments write to Miss Michell (Hon. Secretary).

**Friday.** 2.30—4 p.m.—Mrs. St. Clair Stobart welcomes enquirers.

**WEDNESDAY CIRCLES (limited to eight sitters)**  
Members, 3/-; Non-Members, 4/-

Feb. 19th 2.30 Mrs. Evelyn Thomas 6.30 Miss Evelyn Canon.  
Feb. 26th 2.30 Mrs. Fillmore. 6.30 Miss Jacqueline

Private sittings arranged daily with the following Mediums—Mr. Glover Botham, Miss Frances Campbell, Mrs. Eva Cassel, Mrs. Fillmore, Mrs. Hirst, Miss Jacqueline, Mr. Horace Leaf, Mrs. Rose Livingstone, Mrs. Evelyn Thomas, Miss Lily Thomas and Mr. Frank Leah (Psychic Portraiture).

Friday, February 14th, at 7.30 p.m.  
**MR. R. E. COCKERSELL,**  
Demonstration of Clairvoyance, with accompanying  
Psychic Sketches.  
Members, Silver Collection; Non-members 1/-

Friday, February 21st, at 7.30 p.m.—  
**Mrs. HELEN SPIERS,**  
Demonstration of Psychometry.  
Members, Silver Collection; Non-members, 1/-

Saturday, February 29th, at 8 p.m.  
**LANTERN LECTURE**  
“An Artist Portrays the Dead” by Mr. Frank Leah.  
Dr. MARGARET VIVIAN in the Chair.  
Tickets: Members, 1/-, Non-members, 1/6.  
Reserved Seats: Members, 2/6, Non-members, 3/-.

**PSYCHIC BOOKSHOP AND LENDING LIBRARY OPEN DAILY**  
(Saturdays excepted) 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

“Through the Grotrian Hall,<sup>9</sup> I met Mrs. Stella Hughes and she introduced me to Dr. Alexander Cannon and Dr. Jenssen. This meeting was the beginning of many scientific and semi-scientific experiments to which I willingly gave myself with much interest.”

We have previously featured Dr. Nandor Fodor, Hon. Research Officer of the International Institute for Psychical Research (IIPR).<sup>10</sup> For example, in the study of Mrs. Bullock's transfigurations. “Does Mrs. Bullock's face change?” see *Psypioneer* June 2012.<sup>11</sup>

We continue quotes from *Clock Without Hands*, pp. 33-36:

“I also wrote to Dr. Nandor Fodor, the Research Officer of the National Institute for Psychic Investigation. He had advertised in the psychic press for anyone with mediumistic ability prepared to submit to scientific experiment. He gladly accepted my offer because he was short of mediums. After a few trial sittings, I was asked to produce clairvoyance under a variety of conditions. Among these they “extracted” E.S.P. from me while I was under the influence of nitrous oxide, the gas used in dental surgery. These experiments produced one very interesting effect. Although I got some good E.S.P. for a variety of sitters, almost all of it

<sup>9</sup>.—One of the weekly adverts published in *Light* February 13th 1936 page 109.

<sup>10</sup>.—See *Psypioneer* Volume 7 No 2 February 2011:—*Whatever happened to the British College? – Psychic Science*, and also, *The International Institute for Psychic Investigation (IIPR)*:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP7.2February2011.pdf>

<sup>11</sup>.—See *Psypioneer* Volume 8 No 6: June 2012:—<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP8.6June2012.pdf>

dealt with the past. Usually, about a quarter of the E.S.P. impressions received by me deal with the future. The gas seemed to remove precognition altogether except for an occasional flash. The future is always more difficult to perceive and probably requires the use of that small degree of conscious or semi-conscious control which I seem to be able to exercise over E.S.P. Perhaps the almost total absence of precognition under the gas is to be accounted for by the fact that it rendered me unconscious and therefore unable to control the E.S.P. in any way.

“I also carried out sittings doped with benzedrine. This had quite a different effect. It seemed to stimulate me considerably and also helped to remove personal inhibitions. The consistent excellence of the E.S.P. I obtained after taking this drug showed clearly that personal factors do interfere with E.S.P. It strengthens my conviction that the perfect human instrument to record the strange revelations of the psi faculty should be, as far as possible, quite normal and without neurotic tendencies. Unfortunately, the administration of benzedrine for these experiments gave me inflammation of the kidneys and I was advised by the doctor to stop taking it.

“When I gave sittings under the influence of nitrous oxide, I was, of course, unaware of what happened. Throughout the test, however, a shorthand typist took a record of everything said and my utterances were recorded on a dictaphone. On one occasion I was apparently able to give a Mrs. Worthington an exact description of her white colonnaded home in the “Deep South” of the United States, with many intimate family details.

“Perhaps the most interesting result obtained at these experimental sessions happened under nitrous oxide. The anaesthetist arrived with a Mrs. Buller who was quite unknown to any of us. Under the influence of the gas, my faculty immediately became centred around her. I correctly gave the name of her little brother Peter and said again correctly, that he had died of meningitis. I also told her that there was a dog named Peter buried in the garden, a fact which she also acknowledged.

“Then I received the impression that she had been having discussions about an oil painting: I told her that it was very valuable, but that she would have to wait until she found the right person to deal with. Mrs. Buller was thrilled, for she did possess a painting which she had hoped might be valuable. I gave her other correct facts about this painting and then added that the present coat of paint concealed something important.

“Tests were later made on the portrait itself but nothing could be discovered underneath the top coat of paint. Apparently I had been wrong. Dr. Fodor was not satisfied about this, so he went to see Mrs. Buller again. This is what he discovered, quoted from his description of the case in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*:

“Three fortune-tellers, at different times, spoke to her mother and sister about a painting in her possession which is valuable as it has another painting underneath....

“This case is an excellent illustration how one medium after another can pick up a false scent. What happened, I imagine, was that Mrs. Buller’s mother had a romantic imagination. She had a secret desire that the unknown painting should prove valuable.... The emotional memory of this romantic possibility [that there was a valuable picture underneath the surface paint] was contacted by the first fortune-teller and interpreted as a positive finding. As a result the desire grew into definite expectation. Successive clairvoyants were more and more likely to stumble on it. The story must have left a strong impression in Mrs. Buller’s unconscious mind and thus gave a false lead to Mr. Cockersell.”

“For Dr. Fodor, I also produced a number of successful skotographs. A skotograph is a sealed photographic plate which is carried about for a period by the person being tested. Normally, the plate should be absolutely blank when developed. People possessing the psi faculty seem to be able to influence the photographic plate in a way which no one has ever satisfactorily explained. In my case, several plates proved to be covered with stars, caused, presumably, by some psychic emanation.”

Later in 1935 pp. 37-39:

“In the late summer of 1935, I took part in a missionary attempt to spread spiritualism more widely into the country districts. I think this was the last time anything positive was done by Mrs. St. Clair Stobart and her apostles to reconcile spiritualism with the Church of England. The mission took the form of a caravan tour in different parts of Bedford. Mrs. Stobart was accompanied by myself and the Rev. Maurice Elliot, Vicar of St. Peter’s Church, Cricklewood, who was also eager for the Church to accept spiritualism. I was really a stopgap. I think it had been intended to take Mrs. Estelle Roberts along as clairvoyant, but she cried off at the last moment. Perhaps she felt that this experiment might prove more arduous than successful. Personally, I am always ready for a new experience, and, although I set out with some misgivings, I enjoyed the tour thoroughly.

“The caravan mission attracted the notice of the national press and Mrs. Stobart was hailed as a modern successor to John Wesley. It lasted only a week, however, and although it was supposed to be the first of a nation-wide series of tours, no attempt was ever made to repeat the performance. Why this was I do not know, for the mission was a great success. We set off in Mrs. Stobart’s Rolls Royce with her caravan towed behind. I sat next to the chauffeur, whilst Mrs. Stobart sat in solitary state behind. With her flowing grey hair, large round conical hat and stick between her legs, she looked like every child’s conception of a witch.

“The first meeting was held at Bedford, in the Cooperative Society Hall. It was crowded, and Mrs. Stobart and Mr. Elliot, who had joined us by train, were given a sympathetic hearing. They developed their theme that Christianity had been plain spiritualism until mistranslation of the Bible suppressed the message

of spirit communication.<sup>12</sup> The audience even seemed to accept Mr. Elliot's attempt to whitewash the Witch of Endor. "Endor", he maintained, really meant "limitless capacities", such capacities presumably being both psychic and Christian. As usual, in front of a large, warm audience, I produced a good flow of accurate E.S.P. I remember I succeeded in getting a number of both Christian and surnames and passed on a number of messages from "spirit friends".

"After Bedford, we moved to Loddington, a village not far from Kettering. The meeting, held in the reading room of the local school, was attended by the local vicar, and as this was the first time the villagers had had anything to do with the spirit world, it was a sensation. Judging by the popping eyes which stared up at me from the hall, I should imagine that they still talk about it in the local.

"The last visit of the tour was to Caldecote. The chief reason for going to this village was that Mrs. Stobart's friend Lady Culme Seymour lived nearby at Rockingham Castle. She had attended the Loddington meeting and was keenly interested in spiritualism. In the afternoon, we were invited to tea at the Castle, and Lady Carmichael, an aunt of the Duchess of Gloucester, was present. Lady Culme Seymour asked me to psychometrise a dusty old parchment.<sup>13</sup> I divined rightly that it was a letter written by one of her ancestors in the reign of James II, relating to property which had changed hands in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. I was also able to describe the appearance and clothes of the original writer. All this was closely borne out by a report which had recently been made on the document by an historian.

"That evening, we held a meeting in the "Old Mill Hall". Long before the start, the green outside was obliterated by parked cars, not a few of them Rolls Royces, Daimlers and Bentleys. All the local "county" had decided to patronise this rare novelty. This was my first experience of the "upper crust" *en masse*. I found they made a first-rate audience. Experience has since taught me that the well-born, wealthy and leisured classes are the prop of fortune-tellers, clairvoyants and any new religion however strange or phoney. They are prepared to take on trust far more than the average man and take to anything psychic like ducks to water. I rounded off the meeting, and the tour, with an hour's good clairvoyance and everybody seemed very delighted.

"The spiritualists have missed a great opportunity in not following up this lead given by Mrs. Stobart. In the country where the witch and "conjuror" are still within living memory among the humble, and the aristocratic families are always ready for the novel and the mysterious, the land lies fallow for a really intensive missionary effort.

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<sup>12</sup>.—See *Psypioneer*: Volume 1 No10 February 2005:—*Maurice Elliott and the search for faith*, and also *The Exclusion of mediums from the Church* – Leslie Price:—  
[http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie\\_Price\\_PP10.pdf](http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/Leslie_Price_PP10.pdf)

<sup>13</sup>.—"Laura Culme-Seymour has left memorable accounts of her sittings in seances with Helen Duncan and others", and is briefly mentioned in *Psypioneer*.

“As far as a “marriage” between the Church and spiritualism is concerned, I am glad that Mrs. Stobart lived long enough to see tentative manoeuvres towards an “engagement” between the two. I mean the decision of the bishops to appoint a commission on spirit healing. She must have felt that all the energy she put into this lost cause had not been entirely wasted.”

In October 1938, Ronald claimed to be at the height of his mediumistic powers. He was regularly giving clairvoyance at Bromley Church. After giving some good E.S.P., to one of the church members, the gentleman in question moved to Guernsey where he invited Cockersell to give a demonstration. So impressed with Guernsey, he decided to return nearly a year later and then decided to tour the Channel Islands on his own. Back at home, he worked in a greengrocer’s shop in Kensington living with the owner’s two old friends from the Fulham Spiritualist Church.



In 1942, he was called to service, but weighing less than eight stone, he was not accepted. He met the then well-known medium Ronald Strong<sup>14</sup> whose secretary Marjorie, would become Cockersell’s wife in 1943. Her father got Ronald his first stable job at the Ministry of Supply as a campaign officer, which lasted just eighteen months. He decided to return to Spiritualism, according to his autobiography: “My methods had never been popular with the “old guard”. They complained because there was too much humour, too much liveliness at my meetings ...” he liked to be a showman, run meetings by the music-hall method – “preferred to sell my E.S.P. with a mixture of vaudeville and natural gaiety.”

Cockersell had not been generally in favour of mediums’ spirit guides,<sup>15</sup> and some of the extreme behaviour, which accompanies them – which was accepted without question as

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<sup>14</sup>.—Ronald Strong a former actor was a well-known medium from the late 1930’s producing direct-voice mediumship, and clairvoyance. He held Sunday services at Wigmore Hall, W. London from 1940 until his early death at age 38 in October 1958.

<sup>15</sup>.—Cockersell selected his own guides:—“I built up Di-de to suit my own character. She supposed to be a Cockney girl and so spoke with an accent natural to myself. She was also light-hearted and cheeky, like myself; so much so, that she became a thorn in the flesh of many of the orthodox spiritualists. A *Psychic News* reporter suggested once that she needed a good spanking. As this was impossible, I am sure that many of them would have liked to have made me the whipping-boy.

“My other guide was Men-Kau-Ra, or Mykermos, an Egyptian pharaoh of Greek birth. I found him in the British Museum. I used to go there sometimes because it fascinated me. One day I found myself looking at the mummy of the pharaoh Men-Kau-Ra. I decided he was the spirit guide for me and felt that it would be a change to introduce an historical figure into the séance room. Men-Kau-Ra spoke in a very clipped precise accent. He always addressed the goggling sitter as “child of earth” and this happy thought of mine sounded very distinguished.

“evidence from the other side”. Cockersell with his wife Marjorie, Brian and Irene Brown and a Mrs Fairbanks decided, “it was time someone took a stand against this sort of nonsense.” They formed a Society of the Ankh; Cockersell’s hope was to make enough money out of the society to keep him and Marjorie and “to demonstrate that the psychic power could be divorced from the trappings of pseudo-sancity with success.”

Cockersell states pp. 53-54:



“I did not realise that this new move was to lead me into all the dishonesty and trickery which I condemned so heartily in spiritualism. Nor did I realise that it would bring me near to the brink of madness. Perhaps my E.S.P. ought to have told me. It did not. The often discreditable and stormy period of my life did, however, bring about the most important step of my life as a direct result. It led to a final break with spiritualism, a full realisation that E.S.P. was not the prompting of the spirits, and a lasting desire to investigate the psychic factor objectively as a force of nature which, with study, could be brought within the comprehension of science.

“This, however, was still in the future when we decided to form the Society of the Ankh. The Ankh, represented by a cross with a circle over it, is the ancient Egyptian symbol of eternity. This suggested the object of the society, which was to plumb the secrets of life after death by the demonstration and investigation of all psychic phenomena. From this it will be evident that I had not abandoned the essential beliefs of spiritualism, but I wanted to present them without the trappings of medieval witchcraft.

“To begin with we held our meetings at the Gateways Centre in Pembridge Villas. We used the little room upstairs. From the start we were crowded out and usually had bigger audiences than did Mrs. Irene Edouin in the big hall downstairs with her coterie of psychics, who were mostly healers. These public meetings were held once a week and we used to charge no entrance fee. There was, however, a retiring collection and this usually paid for the hall.

“To live I had to rely on private interviews. At the public meetings there was usually an address on some psychic subject, followed by clairvoyance produced by myself. Afterwards, two or three people would want private interviews, and others, who had been present at the meeting, or had heard about me as a result of the meetings, would ring me up and make

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“My guides were inoffensive creatures of the imagination. They were merely the vehicle of my E.S.P. and I never used them as a means of power and profit as so many mediums have done.”

appointments. For these private sittings I charged a guinea. Since this was usually an hour of good E.S.P. I don't think sitters were overcharged. I made between seven and eight pounds a week and it was just enough to make ends meet.

“Much of the society's work was done at my home. We used to hold private sittings there with members of the Society and it was at these that I made my first tentative attempts to acquire other psychic powers. Up to this time I had confined my demonstrations almost entirely to clairvoyance. From that time onwards I was to try trumpet mediumship, the production of physical phenomena, and even astral projection. In fact I dived into the depths of occult and hocus-pocus. At the same time the cold war between myself and spiritualist orthodoxy began to blow hot, and I had to struggle hard for existence. The result of these two factors was that for the first time in my life I began to cheat at seances.”

Cockersell concluded at this time his extra-sensory powers had convinced hundreds of survival after death and of spirit communication, however his personal experience was “that they are evidence of nothing of the sort.” If we are to accept, what Cockersell writes he is quite clear “I have been a fraudulent medium and have grossly misused the gift of E.S.P. It is no hypocrisy on my part to say I am deeply ashamed of the fact. I believe that I can best make amends by admitting it ...” However, he would claim during a fraudulent physical séance the E.S.P. did remain genuine.

“During direct-voice seances, I was often conscious of speaking in an assumed voice as tradition prescribed, but the subject-matter remained genuinely inspirational. Indeed, the darkness and the strange voice often seemed to sharpen the detail and improve the accuracy and profusion of E.S.P.”

For Cockersell to perpetrate such an objective fraud his first step was to contact Leon Isaacs, whom he had known for a number of years. pp. 68-70:

“Leon was a charming, sincere spiritualist of the best type. He had set out to prove the truth of his spiritualistic beliefs scientifically. He was well equipped to do so. He was then a photographer on a great national paper and had collected some of the latest devices for photography in darkened rooms. He had taken many extraordinary pictures at séances which seemed to illustrate most of the known forms of psychic phenomena. If they were fraudulent, I am quite certain Leon had nothing to do with it. He is the most honest man I have ever met.

““I am getting some results with physical phenomena, Leon,” I told him. “Would you like to arrange a series of test séances and try to get some pictures?”

“Leon jumped at the chance. Physical mediums were few and far between and those who would take the risk of having the truthful eye of the camera upon them were fewer still.

“Next, I found myself buying some cheese-cloth and selecting an expanding carpenter's rule. A little later, I got hold of a small elbow joint of gas-piping. It had been left at the flat by the gas-man. These materials, which I had obtained

almost without thinking what I intended to do with them, are the stock in trade of the fraudulent physical medium—that is with the exception of the elbow joint, which was my own little idea.

“To begin with, we held a number of experimental sittings without cameras or test conditions at which Leon and others were present. At all of these, I became genuinely entranced (this had become almost an automatic reflex stimulated by the lights going out). It was not until the third session that I produced the cheese-cloth.



“I seemed to be looking down from a distance. I observed myself producing the roll of white filmy material from a crack in the blackout blind which covered a window close to the cabinet. I waved it slowly about and, by the rustle of attention from the other sitters, I knew that it was to be seen dimly even in the darkened room. Leon and the others were strongly impressed. Other preliminary frauds of the same sort followed, all produced by myself in the same “other-worldish” state of mind. Then Leon was ready and eager for the seances under test conditions.

“Most of these tests were held in the presence of Mrs. Isaacs, the late Stewart Martin and my wife. Martin, then Editor of *Psychic News*, was a sceptical Scot and not the sort of man to be taken in easily.<sup>16</sup>

“At the first experimental séance, Leon set up a battery of cameras, using infra-red film, so he did not need flash. Although I produced some excellent clairvoyance and drifted off into the strange world of unreality which I have already described, this time I made no effort to cheat. That was to come later.

“After the seance, Leon hurried off to develop the plates he had taken. The same night he rang up. “Well, what happened?” I asked, trying to sound excited although I knew nothing would have appeared. “It’s shattering,” Leon exclaimed. “There is a profile of a lovely Christ like face on your shoulder.” I

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<sup>16</sup>.—Stewart Martin died on January 10, 1947 of a cerebral haemorrhage. He was a well-known crime author for such works as *The Hangman’s Guests*: —New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931. The story of the Bloodstone, a huge diamond with a history of death and horror. The hangman of Dartpark Prison traces its trail of greed and violence in connection with his last five executions. On the eve of his next execution, he narrates his tale to the chaplain of the prison, but one or the other of them, or both, may be other than the people they claim to be. Similar to the story telling structure of Martin’s earlier *The Fifteen Cells* (1928). Hubin (1994), p. 557. In the 1940’s he wrote *Ghost Parade* published by Rider & co. (A reasoned attempt to combat the arguments of the churches, philosophers, and scientists, against the evidence of survival.)

was speechless. Somehow I managed to go on with the conversation. All I wanted to do was hang up the receiver and think.

“The next day I saw the prints. It was certainly something strange and it had happened without any help, fraudulent or otherwise on my part. The picture showed a roughly round mass of filmy white substance, in the centre of which the lines of a majestic profile could be plainly seen.

“At the next two sittings there was no thought of fraud and nothing at all happened. I was deeply disappointed.

“The first shock wore off: I was sure I could do better than that. I did.

“When we assembled for the next séance, I insisted upon being roped to the chair. This was, in fact, no hindrance as I have already explained.<sup>17</sup> Behind the blackout curtain lay all the “properties” for something very special and very fraudulent. Before the lights went out, I was searched. If they had moved the cabinet, things might have been more difficult. From where I had placed it, I could reach the blackout curtain easily through the tent-like folds of material covering it.



“Again I seemed to be far away looking at myself. First I tucked one end of the elbow joint into my belt and held it tightly in position with my stomach muscles. Then I quickly covered the carpenter’s rule with cheese-cloth to give it the look of a bulging, filmy tube. The trumpet at my feet was slipped on to one end of the rule, the other end of which was jammed into the elbow joint. Gradually, I began to expand the carpenter’s rule. Within two minutes, the trumpet was waving slowly nearly six feet away from my body. It was held on the end of the carpenter’s rule which was kept rigid in the angle bracket and covered with cheese-cloth. My hands were at rest on my knees.

“Then I gave the word for cameras. Luckily for the fraudulent, it is understood that the medium himself must always say

when the photographs should be taken. If attempts are made to photograph

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<sup>17</sup>.—Page 64: “I also learned how easy it was to release myself when apparently securely tied. After that I insisted before many séances that I should be tied in my chair. I am small boned and all I had to do was to tense up at the moment the knots were pulled tight. Under the influence of the drug of mediumship, I extracted myself from situations which would have puzzled Houdini and then put myself back into the coils again before the lights went on.”

ectoplasm unexpectedly, or should a sitter attempt to touch or seize it, the medium is supposed to be in danger of mortal injury!

“The picture was a sensation. Nothing like it had ever been taken. It was examined by every method known for showing up possible fraud and found to be “genuine”. It is still exhibited as one of the best pieces of evidence for psychic materialisation.

“Many test séances followed. The most dramatic materialisations were all cheats.”

Below is the result: A short article from *Psychic News* September 7, 1946 under the editorship of Stewart Martin:

### **Pictures taken by Mr. Leon Isaacs by Infra-red Rays.**

THESE pictures, exclusive to “Psychic News,” are of an experimental nature, taken by Leon Isaacs who has had long experience in photography. He used infra-red light and plates at a direct-voice circle of Ronald Cockersell on August 24. There was not any strictly scientific control, Mr. Isaacs tells us, but there was reasonable common-sense control.

The ectoplasm, it may be noted, is very similar to that in the pictures taken by Mr. Isaacs when photographing other direct-voice seances—for instance, the rod touching the trumpet in the picture to the right is very like one photographed with Jack Webber.

Further experiments are in progress in which stricter tests will be imposed. These will be reproduced in *Psychic News* in due course.



Left: (as shown on previous page) An ectoplasmic rod from the medium’s solar plexus holding the trumpet which has no other support. Note the shadow of the trumpet on the wall.

Right: Ectoplasm coming down the medium’s mouth and grasping the end of the trumpet.

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*Psychic News* editor Sue Farrow has kindly given Psypioneer permission to publish some of their archive photographs of Ronald Edwin Cockersell; these include the two portraits, etc of Ronald used already in this article. The trumpet photographs, we can note are taken at the same location as the two images shown in the above article, possibly at the same time e.g., same cloths etc. The other photographs are clearly from a different séance, presumably also taken by Leon Isaacs, as Cockersell does not indicate any other photographers were involved.<sup>18</sup> Some are possibly taken by flash light as well as infra-red photography; these photographs will randomly appear throughout the article.

It is interesting to note from Cockersell “that the medium himself must always say when the photographs should be taken.” It is not always realised that almost all physical séance photography either by conventional flash or infra-red are taken at the instruction of the medium or the medium’s control. This was noted in the recent Helen Duncan articles, on at least one of Jack Webber’s well-known séance photographs – Webber had the shutter release in his hand and it was pressed under the control’s action.

A year later Ronald was planning a dramatic farewell to Spiritualism, when he hired the Albert Hall at a cost of £157. 10s. 0d. A friend of Cockersell, who had previously put up the funds for his large meeting, paid the fee. For some years Spiritualist organisations primarily the Spiritualists’ National Union, and the Marylebone Spiritualist Association, had tried to limit Cockersell’s activities and had published their concerns in the psychic press regarding the Albert Hall. Abdy Collins Director of *Psychic News* granted Cockersell a contract giving him advertising space. Requests from the SNU President Harold Vigurs, Percy Hitchcock MSA President, and others including the Greater World C.S.L., President Mr Bendall, sought a controlled voice séance prior to the Albert Hall meeting, but Cockersell refused.

Numerous letters were exchanged in *Psychic News* for October 11th, including a letter from Ronald’s wife pointing out they will be offered a guest box at the Albert Hall; this was signed by Marjorie Cockersell, Company Secretary, Ankh Publications, Ltd. Also published was an open letter from Cockersell’s solicitor clarifying that their client cannot, “recognise you (SNU etc) as having any control or authority, even implied, over his activities.” Ronald Edwin Cockersell’s Centennial Cavalcade of Psychic Phenomena took place on October 25th 1947, and quotes “despite the

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<sup>18</sup>.—Possibly some were set up by him and taken by remote control etc.

fulminations against me, nearly 2,000 people attended.” It was further claimed that his clairvoyance and direct-voice demonstrations produced excellent results.<sup>19</sup>

*Psychic News* now under the editorship of A. W (Billy) Austen,<sup>20</sup> who previously was the assistant editor to Stewart Martin. Austin had been with the paper since its inception in May 1932, he would continue as the paper’s editor to 1953. Later he and his wife moved to West Perth, Australia and became involved with *Psychic Science News Magazine*. (The PN editorship was then continued by Fred Archer.) The report on the Royal Albert Hall meeting was short, giving little information, and was published on October 11th 1947:

## **The Albert Hall “Cavalcade”**

A SERIES of psychic pictures, enlarged on a mammoth screen, direct voice and clairvoyant demonstrations, with a few musical solo items and an address by a band leader provided the “Cavalcade of Psychic Phenomena” presented at the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday by the Society of the Ankh.

One of the best messages of the evening came during the clairvoyance, when Cockersell asked if anyone had a dog named Trix.

A man in the gallery admitted that knew two dogs with that name, one dead and one alive.

Cockersell asked, “Isn’t there a photo of this dog taken in the garden, and wasn’t it taken when you were in much happier circumstances than you are now?”—“Yes, definitely.”

### **BROTHER’S TROUSERS**

“Who, connected with you, has got varicose veins?” was the clairvoyant’s next question. After a considerable pause the man recalled this and also acknowledged that he knew something about healing.

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<sup>19</sup>.—*Psychic News* October 11th 1947: “I HOPE none of the people attending the Albert Hall last Saturday regarded the “cavalcade of psychic phenomena” as a serious presentation of Spiritualism. It was a demonstration of clairvoyance and alleged direct voice by Ronald Cockersell who has proclaimed that he is not a Spiritualist.

“I say “alleged” because Cockersell declined to prove his direct-voice manifestations when challenged recently by a group of responsible Spiritualists—the presidents of four of the leading organisations in the movement.

“**No Test:** And the conditions under which this phenomenon was demonstrated at the Albert Hall could not be classed test conditions by any stretch of imagination. In fact, the microphone was inside the cabinet.

“The demonstration would have been more impressive if the messages had been confined to people who were strangers to the medium.

“Of the rest of the programme little need be said here, except to say that one of the star attractions—Charles Shadwell, of the B.B.C.—was unable to attend. I am told that the hall was not more than half filled.” [Pspioneer: —It has a capacity (depending on configuration of the event) of up to 5272 seats].

<sup>20</sup>.—Billy Austen was the first official stenographer for the teachings of Silver Birch. He was followed by Frances Moore, a lady whom Silver Birch (known to the circle as “Big Jump”) always called “the scribe” and who would serve until Barbanell’s death on July 17th, 1981 at the age of 79. The first book, *Teachings of Silver Birch*, was issued in March 1938, edited by A.W. Austen, with a foreword by Hannen Swaffer.

“Well,” retorted Cockersell. “You and the healing and the varicose veins should get together.”

Reference to the recipient’s interest in psychic photography, automatic writing, printing and book-binding were all confirmed and then Cockersell rocked the Albert Hall with:

“Do you mind if I ask you a personal question? Did you ever wear your brother’s cut-down trousers?”

The man admitted this.

“I thought so,” added the clairvoyant, “because I could see you in trousers which appeared to be bequeathed to you.”

### **ENLARGED SNAP**

This man also acknowledged that he had once lived near an orchard and had kept pigeons.

Another message hovered momentarily between the gallery and arena. It was from a communicator named Ken and was finally clinched by a lady in the arena, who confirmed the evidence when Cockersell asked if she knew of a photograph of Ken which had been enlarged from a snap.

She was not related to the communicator but knew his mother.

The medium spoke of Ken’s endeavours to get through at table seances, which was admitted, then, he added, “And there have been a lot of mistakes.”

“Quite right,” was the reply.

Mrs. L. A. Calderwood, of 28 Cheriton Square, Balham, the recipient of the message, confirmed to a *Psychic News* representative that Ken had endeavoured often to get through at table sittings with his mother, but her enthusiasm “diverted the message.”

### **THE RUMBA KING**

Edmundo Ros, the band leader, well-known for his Latin-American style of playing gave a short address in which he advocated a more practical approach to mediumship. He explained how he had been interested in the subject for some time and pointed to the growing interest of the ordinary man.

“A medium who can give practical advice is doing an encouraging job,” he said. “It is then that the ordinary man becomes convinced of this psychic factor in our midst.”

The display of psychic pictures of mediums, past and present showed the production of various phenomena—materialisations, levitations and ectoplasmic rods.

### DIRECT VOICE

Kenneth Saunders, the radio actor, who was to have commentated on these pictures, was unable to attend and Peter Bayliss deputised for him.

Herbert Oliver the well-known composer, Nellie Sallis, the singer, and a 16-year-old pianist, Philip Archer, contributed the musical items.

After the direct voice demonstration, which lasted about 20 minutes. Cockersell—who acted throughout as his own chairman—made a speech in which he advocated a “factual” presentation of psychic evidence.

Cockersell’s rendering of the event pp. 87-88:

“I feel we gave them a good show. Edmundo Ros, the band leader, for whom I had previously given some excellent E.S.P., spoke of his experiences of the psychic. Pictures of phenomena of the séance room by Leon Isaacs (including several fraudulent efforts of my own) were shown on a 50-foot screen.<sup>21</sup> My own clairvoyance and direct-voice demonstrations produced excellent results.

“All this, however, was leading up to the production of “Dead Bob” who had twice returned from the “other side” to give evidence at spiritualist séances. Bob was a cousin of my wife who had been reported missing when Singapore was taken by the Japanese. One night Marjorie was at a séance at the Garrick Theatre when Mrs. Estelle Roberts came through with a message from her guide “Red Cloud”. “Bob calling for Marjorie,” she announced in her fruity voice. Marjorie acknowledged that she might have lost someone of this name and Estelle produced some excellent clairvoyance and description which obviously applied to Bob. *Psychic News* splashed this “evidence from

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<sup>21</sup>.—“**TOO MUCH FOR ANYONE TO SWALLOW**” by **Leon Isaacs**: —“I SAT with Ronald Cockersell, as he was then, for a large number of experimental circles, most of which were without test conditions as I wanted him to feel at ease and thus get the best conditions.

“I judged results on my experience with other physical mediums. Knowing that some of them sometimes cheat, either consciously or otherwise, I was always on my guard.

“I was well aware he could get out of ropes, as the straining and noise were so obvious, and things did not start until he was free.

“I have a large number of photographs of him which I do not show to anyone, as I am not interested in fraudulent pictures, which merely waste my time and materials.

“The pictures of him in bathing trunks are not shown at my public lectures, as the cheese-cloth, with its folds and selvedge, is so obvious, that it is too much for anyone to swallow.

“My practice is to show the pictures as examples of what happens at physical circles, and to let the viewers judge for themselves whether they are genuine.

“Knowing Cockersell had some genuine power, I patiently endured all the obvious fraud, hoping the truth would emerge something.”

Taken from the *Two Worlds* December 10th 1955, when the story of the confessions broke.

the dead". Later a trumpet medium also claimed to have contacted Bob on the other side.

"As the great audience in the Albert Hall waited expectantly, I told this story. "Now I am going to prove to you that someone can return from the dead," I told them. I gave a sign and Bob walked on to the stage. For five minutes there was pandemonium. When it died down, I made my protest. I pointed out that the clairvoyance given at the original séance had been brilliant in all but one thing. Although the medium had perfectly described Bob, this excellent E.S.P. had been misinterpreted as a message from the dead, which it was not. Psychic phenomena and clairvoyance, I told the meeting, were a reality but that did not necessarily prove survival. Until they were shorn of their pseudo-religious significance, no attempt could be made to study them.

"I actually lost money on the Albert Hall meeting after I had paid Geoffrey back, and an additional £100 on entertainment tax. I could have saved the latter if I had included all the spiritualistic paraphernalia of hymns and prayers. My protest, however, was dearer to me than the profit; for it was more than a protest, it was the outward evidence of my severance from spiritualism.

"This step was not taken, however, without a mental battle which all but took my reason. Afterwards, I was haunted by doubts. Even the "guides" which I had manufactured still seemed to be so much part of me that I could not be rid of them. Were they really the voices of the dead? Was I really right in my decision and could all these big names of spiritualism be wrong? For weeks, the problem revolved in my head. I almost forgot what sleep was: I was nearly at the end of my tether, and it seemed as though there was no one to whom I could turn to for advice. With this raging in my head, I found myself passing the Catholic Church of the Brompton Oratory.

"In a flash, it seemed to me that for once I should attempt to obtain guidance from the oldest of the Christian Churches. I went in, bought a votive candle, and found my way to the shrine of the Virgin Mary. I made no prayer, just lit the candle and placed it before the shrine. Then I walked out."

"That night, for the first time for weeks, I slept peacefully. The next morning, I knew that I had abandoned spiritualism and sham for ever. I also knew that I would go to Africa."

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## **In conclusion:**

In the spring of the following year, 1948, the Cockersells spent a year in South Africa at Johannesburg, where Ronald lectured, demonstrated in hired halls, and organised venues. He returned to England a year later, shortly after embarking to Canada,<sup>22</sup> and New York, this time without his wife, and on his return they divorced.<sup>23</sup>

Cockersell had over the years gained various nicknames; to friends he was generally known as Ronnie; other names included “Cocky Cockersell,” and “Psychic”.

In the March of 1950 he was on daytime television 9.30 – 10.00. One report in the *Essex Newsman – Herald* Tuesday March 15th page five states:

“For half-an-hour Ronald Cockersell kept the viewers’ attention focused on him. This is a difficult thing for one man to do. In that time he did not stop talking.

“I [Sheila Pattison] pitied the unfortunate victims, supposedly unknown to Ronald Cockersell who were told the most intimate details of their life by him.”

Around this period he was living in Notting Hill Gate with the French artist Marcel Poncin who was known for his spirit paintings of Silver Birch, Estelle Roberts’ Red Cloud and Spirit Friends, and “Poppet,” guide of Lilian Bailey etc. Poncin died in June 1953. In 1955 *Clock Without Hands* was published, bringing to light his confessions about his physical séances which had long concerned the major Spiritualist organisations. These confessions were headlined in the Spiritualist and national press alike; the headlines have generally been covered in this article. A review of the book for the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was undertaken by Denys Parsons,<sup>24</sup> who had met and sat in a dark physical séance under the guidance of Men-Kau-Ra with Cockersell at his flat in Notting Hill Gate; later there was another meeting at Parsons flat for clairvoyance. His comment is rather strange “One of my lady guests was told a great deal about convent life which she afterwards confirmed, but then she had a French accent.”

Parsons also noted,<sup>25</sup> “The Society has a file about five inches thick on Cockersell, consisting largely of reports of clairvoyance and psychometry tests. All are inconclusive.” There are some incorrect statements in the review for example “... confesses that all his physical phenomena were fraudulent ...” we have noted in this article Cockersell did not confess that all his physical phenomena were fraudulent.

Parsons further incorrectly states, “Edwin also owns to faking much of his ‘clairvoyant’ material. The educational value of these passages is so great that a lengthy quotation is

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<sup>22</sup>.—Left Liverpool on April 14th 1949 for Montreal, Canada, (date of birth given as 1915) occupation given as lecturer. Three week excursion to New York arrived in Buffalo on July 15th, arriving back in London from Quebec, Canada, on the *Samaria*, on August 29th 1949.

<sup>23</sup>.—His wife’s full name was Effie Marjorie Chester (1912-1966).

<sup>24</sup>.—*Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (JSPR) March 1956 Vol. 38, No. 687.

<sup>25</sup>.—Denys Parsons see:—<http://www.answers.com/topic/denys-parsons>

imperative for the benefit of members who ignore my exhortation to read and digest this book. The important chapter is entitled 'How to Rig a Séance', and it is brutally frank." It's very probable that Cockersell used some of the methods quoted from this chapter referred to, but that is not what Cockersell is saying. He maintained that his psychic faculty i.e. clairvoyance – E.S.P., was genuine.

Nearing the end of the autobiography, Cockersell stated he would die in 1981 –But the *Fulham Chronicle* April 5th 1968 reported:

### **SAID HE WAS 'TIRED OF THIS PLANET'**

STATED by a friend to have talked a lot about death and to have said he was "tired of this planet," Ronald Edwin, aged 53 was found<sup>26</sup> dead at his home in New King's Road. This was revealed at the inquest when a verdict that he took his own life was recorded.

Miss Dorothy Witheridge, housekeeper of the house in New Kings Road, said Edwin had not worked for some time and recently he said he had a cold and spent most of his time in bed.

She last saw him alive on March 18, when he looked ill. She did not see him for a few days or hear anything from his room. So she telephoned a Mr. Curwen. After she identified Edwin's signature on a letter, the coroner, Dr. John Burton, commented that it was a very friendly letter.

[word/s missing] ... Edwin was in any financial difficulties, she replied: "Maybe, but he could have asked me."

### **DEPRESSED**

A friend, Mr. Gilbert Curwen, of King's Road, Fulham, said he saw Edwin a week before his death. He was depressed then, and had been for some considerable time. "He talked a lot about death and said he was tired of this planet. He was very objective about it. He said over and over again that his time was up. He was very obstinate."

PC Harold Rogers said he took possession of two bottles that contained tablets and a sealed letter addressed to "Miss Witheridge".

Dr. Richard Pearce, pathologist, said the cause of death was acute barbiturate poisoning, and he added that it had been taken in a large quantity.

The coroner said Edwin left a letter which was both helpful and friendly, but the evidence showed he quite clearly intended to take his own life.

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<sup>26</sup>.—*West London Observer* puts him at age 54.

Prior to his death Maurice Barbanell, who knew Ronald,<sup>27</sup> sums up in *Two Worlds* April 5th 1958 page 6:

## **Fake medium ends up in jail HE COULD HAVE BEEN A GREAT PSYCHIC**

A MAN who for years gave proof that he possessed striking psychic powers is now serving a two-year sentence for house breaking.

Retribution, which is, after all, only the law of cause and effect, has come to Ronald who will be remembered by older Spiritualists as Ronald Cockersell.

He was born a psychic, but, alas, he also had a constant chip on his shoulder and an inferiority complex which he disguised by assuming an aggressiveness that earned him the nickname “Cocky Cockersell.” Everyone was out of step except himself.

But there was no doubt about his psychic powers. Thousands witnessed his brilliant clairvoyance all over the country. And in private his evidence of Survival was equally striking.

Though he was encouraged and helped by leading Spiritualists and by sympathetic officials of our societies, Ronnie always bit the hand that fed him. He could easily have written a book on “How not to win friends or influence people.”

No one in Spiritualism had more chances than Ronnie—and no one threw them all away as he did. When I tried to help him, after having had personal evidence from him, spontaneously, I had to throw my hand in when I discovered he was erroneously and foolishly bragging, “*I’ve got Maurice Barbanell in my pocket.*”

That distinguished Spiritualist, Mrs. M. A. St. Clair Stobart, tried too, but his rudeness and flippancy when giving clairvoyance at her excellent and dignified Grotrian Hall services forced her to leave him alone.

### **Large-scale flop!**

Ronnie had his own monthly magazine and founded his own Spiritualist society, but they both folded up.

**He ran into trouble when he said he possessed physical mediumship and offered to demonstrate it. He gave a seance at which electrical apparatus showed that he was out of his chair 18 times, coinciding with the movements of the two trumpets.**

At his subsequent public “voice seances” there were frequently interruptions and protests from the audience. But, still cocky as ever, he organised another—at the Royal Albert Hall! It was a flop.

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<sup>27</sup>.—During the mid-1930’s they sometimes took the Sunday service together at the Spiritualist Community, Grotrian Hall, Barbanell as speaker and Cockersell as demonstrator.

Ronnie, having antagonized nearly everybody in Spiritualism, turned his back on the movement and became an anti-Spiritualist in outlook. By deed poll he dropped his surname, styling himself by his Christian names of Ronald Edwin. And he announced that he was no longer a medium but, in the new jargon of psychical research, an “extra-sensory-perceptionist.”

Believe it or not, more chances came his way; but he threw them all away. He appeared on radio and television. He was taken up for experiments by a Sunday newspaper. A publishing house provided financial backing for a new monthly magazine for him to edit. He was commissioned to write his autobiography, *Clock Without Hands*. Its publishers tried to sponsor a lecture tour for him.

In turn, Ronnie alienated them all.

Because of all this publicity he was inundated with requests for “sittings,” but many of these visitors were rightly annoyed by his needless rudeness.

His autobiography gave him, he thought, a chance to retaliate, to hit back at Spiritualists. Not only did he confess to faking at his “voice séances” —he had already been found out—but he attacked Spiritualists right, left and centre, hoping some of the mud would stick.

**Where did he learn how to fake? The answer is simple.<sup>28</sup> He was associated with the notorious William Roy and that other trickster, John Scammell. For one period they gave joint “séances.”**

Then Ronnie fell on hard times. His luck ran out—and he had to work for a living, something that he found distasteful. In turn he was a ladies hairdresser, a steward on board ship and a door-to-door canvasser selling books.

Not long ago, my wife met him in the street. “I’m broke,” he said, “buy me a drink.”

He could have been one of the greatest psychic exponents of the age. Instead, tempted by the lure of “easy money,” he languishes in prison.

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<sup>28</sup>.—This is almost certainly referring to William Roy (p77):—“There are of course many ways of gathering information about sitters. I heard of a most ingenious one not long ago. A certain direct-voice trumpet medium, whom I knew to be fraudulent, started setting surprisingly accurate evidence from casual visitors to the circle he held in his own house. His wife subsequently told me how this was done. The medium insisted that his sitters should leave all their belongings in an anteroom before the séance. “There must, be nothing about you,” he would tell them, “which would help me to identify you or tend to absorb the power. Then you will know that the evidence I give you is from the ‘other side’.” As soon as the lights went out and the séance started, his wife went carefully through the handbags, overcoats and other possessions. She then transmitted any background data obtained through a microphone to the medium who had a receiver concealed in a cabinet.

“On one occasion, his wife found a police warrant card in one of the handbags. “The woman in the green jumper is a nark,” she warned her husband. The medium not only avoided saying anything which might have rendered him liable to prosecution under the Witchcraft Act, but told the policewoman that she had strong mediumistic tendencies and was very spiritual. She went away twittering with pleasure, convinced it was all genuine.”

Ronnie's "extra-sensory perception," which, he boasted enabled him to see the future, had not shown his own fate. It's a great pity that instead of seeing, as he said he could do, backwards and forwards in time, he's doing time instead.

M.B.

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## **Finally:**

A further acknowledgment is made to David Chester who has provided me with various dates and information, including details of Ronald's suicide. David is connected to Effie Cockersell (nee Chester), and it was through his interest in researching his Family History that he found the name Ronald Edwin Cockersell mentioned in *Psypioneer*. We have noted the birth/death date of Effie Marjorie, but he further states that she also committed suicide on August 6th 1966 at her home in London. David related a family story to me stating: "it is information handed down which I have to emphasise is "un-verified", but it was quite comprehensive at the time back in 2001." He wrote to the Archivist at the Museum of Television and Radio in New York City to see if the story could be verified but received no reply. He further states "My own feeling is that the majority is possibly true, but re-iterate is all "un-verified" and therefore caution should be forefront with any publication of this detail!"

"He went to America and was interviewed on Television about his "physic powers". As a result he was given his own show called "Predictions". One of the Predictions he gave was that President John F. Kennedy would be assassinated by a man with a pot marked face, by a grassy knoll and a Spanish style Church type Building and big cars. A trip to Cuba was cancelled because of concern about Security surrounding the President. The CIA questioned Ronald about his public predictions. The Television Show went on for a few months, but the Prediction did not materialise and the ratings fell and consequently Ronald was dropped. He got back to the UK penniless and turned up at 133, Kings Road, where a relation put him up.

"Some months later John F. Kennedy did get assassinated. The Police came to 133, Kings Road to show Ronald pictures of Lee Harvey Oswald and asked if he was the killer, to which Ronald answered NO. He was then shown a picture of Jack Ruby and was asked the same question, to which he replied NO. He was shown a crowd photograph, which included the grassy knoll, the Spanish style Church type Building and big cars. The Prediction had come true!"

Paul J. Gaunt

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# PARAPSYCHOLOGIST MASSIMO BIONDI

## COMMENTS

Thanks for the June 2013 edition of *Psypioneer*.<sup>29</sup> May I send you a comment?

As published below:

“I have just read Leslie Price’s note on the “missed affair” of psychical researchers with Eusapia Palladino. If I may, I would like to confirm the claims of Prescott reported by Leslie Price. Not long ago, I undertook an examination fairly extensive (though not completely exhaustive) of the issue, that allowed me to say with some certainty that no psychical researcher, nor any other of the male attendees to her séances, ever had any sexual relationship with her, though her behavior ended at her detriment. Here is what I wrote on the matter in a chapter on Spiritualism in Italy in a forthcoming anthology edited by Christopher M. Moreman:

“A lot of problems arose with regard to her [Eusapia’s] activity, the first one being the question of the said “supernormal” nature of her phenomena; another, her ill-mannered behavior in the course of the séances. Regarding the first point, it should be noted that many times during her activity; Eusapia Palladino was exposed and criticized, for it was evident that often she obtained her phenomena by resorting to tricks. (...) Another negative feature of Eusapia Palladino was her habit of making sexual advances to one or more of the males during the séances, so outraging those in attendance. Usually, she justified her behavior by asserting that she could not get control of herself during the trance, although ultimately no indecorous acts ever occurred (emphasis added). However, for all of these points, she was generally criticized. Researchers did value her only for the physical phenomena she produced, and most of the spiritists preferred to look elsewhere, that is to different mediums, for evidence of spirit intervention and reliable “communications.” (Spiritualism in Italy: The Opposition of the Catholic Church, in: C.M. Moreman (Ed.) *The Spiritualist Movement: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World. Volume 1: The American Origins and Global Proliferation*, Praeger 2013, p. 45.).<sup>30</sup>

Bests

Massimo Biondi.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>.—Volume 9 No. 06, June 2013:—*Notes by the Way: Researchers did not have affair with Eusapia – Leslie Price.*

<sup>30</sup> See: —<http://www.amazon.com/books/dp/0313399476> *The Spiritualist Movement [3 volumes]: Speaking with the Dead in America and around the World*, edited by Christopher M. Moreman.

<sup>31</sup>.—Massimo Biondi—The Parapsychological Association:—<http://www.parapsych.org/users/mbiondi/profile.aspx>

# SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT FAIRIES – Arthur Conan Doyle

**Note by LP.**

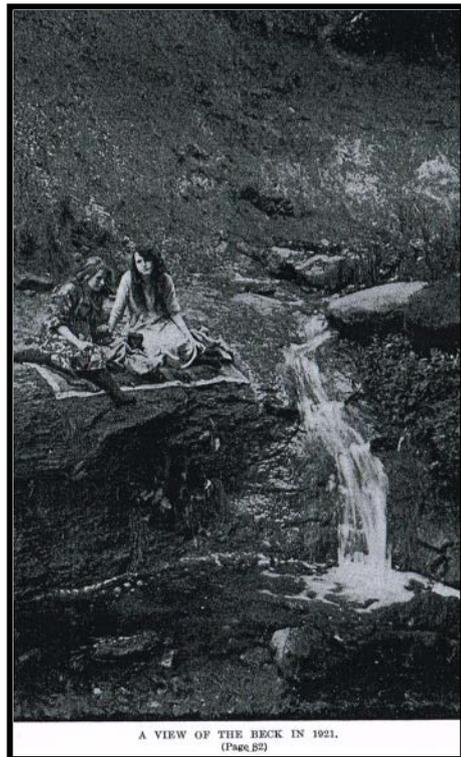
*The Coming of the Fairies* (1922) has often been reprinted, but only the first edition. In 1928, Psychic Press, ACD's own imprint, issued a second edition, with a new appendix, and changes in the photos to include gnomes. The appendix was by Florizel Von Reuter and dealt with sprites [not to be confused with spirits]. In addition, Sir Arthur contributed a new preface. So far as I am aware, this second edition has not been reprinted. Surely the student needs to consider this later preface, and accordingly we reprint it here.

## **Preface to Second Edition “The Coming of the Fairies,” pp. 5-7:**

WHEN I wrote a comment in the first edition of this book six years ago, I said that the narrative and the photographs represented either the most elaborate and ingenious hoax ever played upon the public, or else they constituted an event in human history which might in the future appear to have been epoch-making in its character. I have no hesitation now in saying that the second alternative holds the field, and that the experience of the two little girls at Cottingley,<sup>32</sup> and their power of recording it, are destined to mark a definite advance of an enormously important character in human knowledge.

Surely the point needs no elaboration. The discovery by Columbus of a new terrestrial continent is a lesser achievement than the demonstration of a completely new order of life inhabiting the same planet as ourselves, and separated from us by so small a difference in vibration that they come within the range of our retina under conditions which the evidence here collected shows to be not infrequent. It is an enormous event, the importance of which can hardly be exaggerated.

No rational objection or criticism has in these six years been raised against the photographs. They have, as the text shows, been subjected to minute criticism by some of the first experts in the land, the negatives being submitted to them, and they have passed the ordeal triumphantly. The idea that two children of 10 and 13 years, which was their age in 1917, could have thus baffled the experts and arranged these graceful and beautiful forms is one which offends the reason. Numerous wild statements, such as that they are copies of fairies in a well-



A VIEW OF THE BECK IN 1921.  
(P. 85)

<sup>32</sup>.—See the video from the BBC Antiques Road show – “daughter of Frances Griffiths, one of the two girls who took the famous Cottingley Fairy pictures”:—[www.woodlandway.org/Cottingley\\_Fairies.htm](http://www.woodlandway.org/Cottingley_Fairies.htm)

known advertisement, have been circulated, but a comparison will show that there is no truth in the assertions.

It is interesting to note that the two photographs taken in 1917 are superior to the three of 1920. Were the photographs the result of manipulation, one would, of course, expect it to be the opposite. The fact is that as the girls—or one of them—approached puberty she began, as so often happens, to lose the finer psychic power, and the gap increased between her and these dainty little creatures, whose presence even if we cannot see them will surely add a fresh glamour to our woodland scenery.

A curious sidelight upon the case reached us from South Africa. The younger girl came from that country, and in 1917 had written a post card from Yorkshire to a little friend in her old home, talking of the fairies as being among the wonders of Cottingley. This post card was published in the South African Press, and is an additional proof of the honesty of the girls.

I would warn the critic not to be led away by the foolish sophistry that, because some professional trickster apt at the game of deception can produce a somewhat similar effect under his own conditions, therefore the originals are produced in the same way. The same specious reasoning has been used against other psychic phenomena, but there are few realities of any kind which may not be copied and such a copy is no valid argument against the existence of the original.

I would add that the whole subject of the objective existence of a subhuman form of life has nothing to do with the larger and far more vital question of Spiritualism. The survival and development of the human soul is an entirely separate question.

Several alleged fairy photographs have been sent to me during these years, some of which Mr. Gardner and I have shown to be mischievous concoctions.<sup>33</sup> There is one, however, which bears every sign of being genuine. It is reproduced with an account of its origin in the appendix. Also at the very last moment I received an account of fairies in Germany, well documented and accompanied by photographs. These also have been added to the book, and greatly strengthen my case.

It may interest readers to know that Mr. Wright, the father, has died in the interval, and that little Elsie is now a married woman and is living happily abroad.

Readers who desire further information about Fairies are referred to Godfrey Hodson's little book, *Fairies at Work and Play*.

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.  
*April 1928.*

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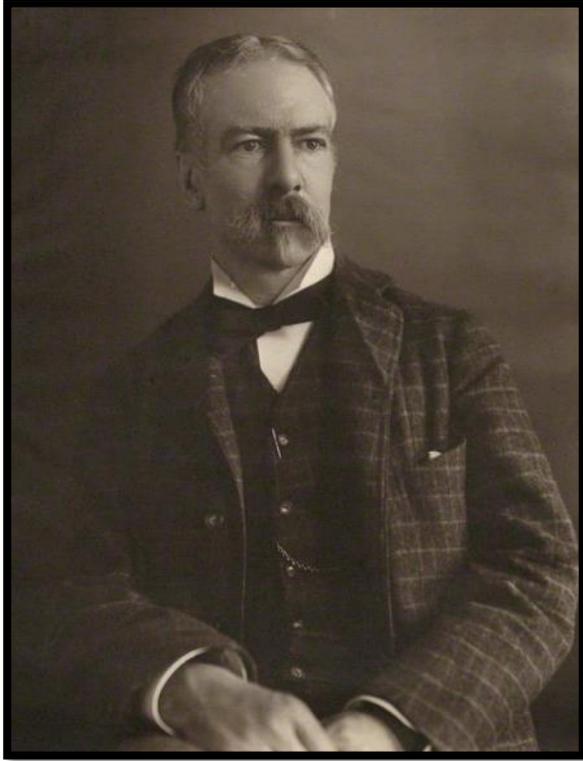
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<sup>33</sup>—See also *Psypioneer* Volume 3, No 1; January 2007:—*The Yorkshire Fairies: The Coming of The Fairies – Lantern Lecture by Mr. E. L. Gardner*: —<http://www.woodlandway.org/PDF/PP3.1January07.pdf>

# Why Massey?

## A Justification for a Biography of Charles Carleton Massey

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Leslie Price has asked me to write an explanation for my recent work on the life of Charles Carleton Massey (1838 – 1905) and I am happy to do so. My interest in Massey began at the request of one of my other doctoral advisers at the University of Exeter, Prof. Richard Noakes who suggested that I work a biography of Massey into my thesis. My first step was to read W. F. Barrett's compilation of Massey's writings in *Thoughts of a Modern Mystic* (1909). After initially reading this work, I realized that there was some immense value in his writings; however, anything of worth remained buried in Barrett's insistence to print each letter in its entirety. This format made the work largely inaccessible, a feeling that was expressed immediately following its publication in *The New Age Volume* review which referred to Massey's

writing as 'marked by sincerity a little dull and by striving a little painful.'<sup>34</sup> Given this 'painful' ambiguity, I have not subjected myself to such restrictions as Barrett and have organized this book topically, attempting to mine out the diamonds in the rough of Massey's writings; thus, I have edited the editor (though to be fair to Massey, twenty-first century writing standards have changed quite a bit since Victorian England i.e. we live in a time when simple direct shorthand is favored over the long flowery writing that became a hallmark of Victorian writing).

After this initial research, I realized that including Massey in my thesis was not practical; however, I recognized the philosophical value that his writings could exert on other Christians and fellow clergy members if only they could be reorganized and presented in a more clear format. It was only after appreciating how much work this reorganization would take and adding this to the lack of accessibility and high purchase cost of Barrett's compilation (online copies if you can find them sell between \$375-\$500 and this particular book is NOT available on Google Ebooks) that I realized that perhaps other researchers would be interested in these notes as well. On a whim, I typed up a very brief book proposal and sent it to an editor at a well-known book publisher. I had initially intended on writing this book as a spiritual manual, at least until I heard back from said

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<sup>34</sup>—'Thoughts of a Modern Mystic', *Literary Supplement to The New Age*, 2:760 (1 April 1909), 1.

editor who seemed very excited about the possibility of publishing this work as an academic volume (though this contract is still under consideration).

Yet, even at this point I was still not sure what it was that I wanted this book to convey. After much thought, I decided to divide it into three sections: 1) Biography (that includes many never before published letters), 2) The topical arrangement of quotations (the spiritual part) and 3) Rare writings (which may end up getting cut by the editors). This made me scour the world's libraries for anything written by Massey. I found several rare publications which included 'A Letter from the President and Vice President of the Theosophical Society' and 'The Metaphysical Basis of *Esoteric Buddhism*. A letter by C.C.M'. I was very excited to obtain these letters as Joy Mills in her *Reflections on the Mahatma Letters* implied that these writings no longer existed and now for the first time in a long while interested readers can better understand the early 'Christian' debate in the Theosophical Society that supposedly led to the resignation of Anna Kingsford, Edward Maitland and C. C Massey (or did it?).<sup>35</sup>

I have quoted liberally from Barrett through this work though I have diverted from him in my inclusion of an in-depth biography that provides a more balanced account of Massey's life and his affiliations, including his integral role in the British Theosophical Society (an affiliation that Barrett seemed to ignore in his compilation). Also, I have strived in this publication, not to intentionally withhold or manipulate Massey's writings in order to fulfill any agenda of the editor or publisher – the main goal of this book is to allow C. C. Massey to speak for himself.

So this provides an answer to the question 'How?' this work came about, but please allow me to close by answering an equally important question – 'Why?'

Well, Massey did translate two important philosophical works from German to English (*Transcendental Physics* by Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner [1881] and *The Philosophy of Mysticism* by Carl du Prel [1888/9]); however, the greatest justification for this biography can be found in the most neglected section of any book – the 'Index'. In fact the very principle that makes C. C. Massey relevant in today's culture were the various personalities to whom he remains connected. The list boasts over 100 prominent Victorian individuals, including Leo Taxil (Gabriel Jorgand-Pagés), Henry George Liddell, and A.E. Waite. If nothing else can be said about the life of Massey, he stood in the crossroads of Victorian culture connecting philosophy, politics, science and religion and it seems that some appreciation for these achievements is long overdue. This book is the first step and hopefully it will inspire others to revisit a fascinating character in Victorian history.

Rev. Jeff Lavoie  
PhD candidate, University of Exeter  
General Editor, *Research Journal of German Antiquities* ([www.rjoga.org](http://www.rjoga.org))

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<sup>35</sup>—'While we have neither the Kingsford-Maitland circular that initiated the debate concerning Sinnett's book nor Massey's pamphlet, nevertheless, reading Subba Row's lengthy and detailed defence of Sinnett's work and Damodar's comments is an exercise of great value for the serious student of esoteric philosophy.' (emphasis added) Joy Mills, *Reflections on an Ageless Wisdom: A Commentary on The Mahatma Letters* (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2010), pp. 455-456.

## BOOKS WE HAVE REVIEWED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Paul J. Gaunt

