

The PIONEER

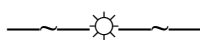
The Pioneer is
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Volume 7, No. 6: December 2020

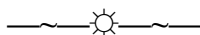
Contents list:



The Pioneer (bi-monthly) is now part of the recommended reading for the Spiritualists' National Union's education courses.

This history journal is presented using original researched material wherever possible. Articles and quotes are taken from original sources as they were published at the time and reproduced by optical character recognition (OCR), the conversion of scanned images of handwritten, typewritten or printed text into machine-encoded text. This means that grammar, old English, spelling mistakes, etc. are not usually changed. However, long paragraphs are sometimes split for easier reading; any errors or explanations needed are noted in footnotes.

Special thanks to Charles Coulston for his work in sub-editing this issue



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pioneer@snu.org.uk

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A MEANS OF SPIRIT COMMUNICATION

Designed from the Spirit World!

It began with a newspaper article in 1925 by a dying man called George Jobson, who asked the question,

“Is there an After-World?”

Mr Kirkby contacted the sick man and he tells his story in his own words, published in *Psychic News*, June 30th, 1934:

SPIRIT INVENTIONS FROM BEYOND

A SEQUEL TO A DEATH-BED PROMISE

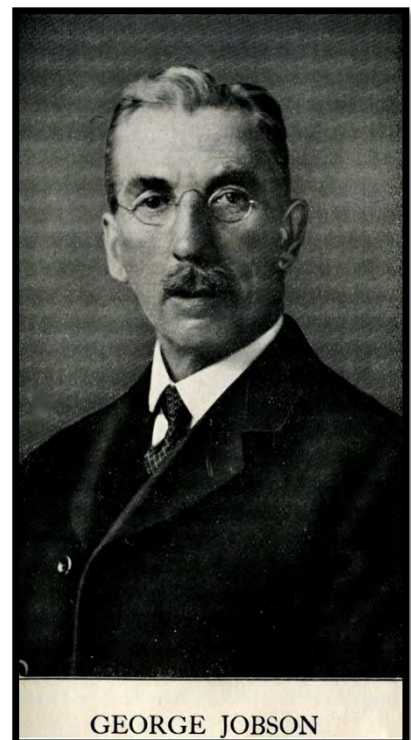
By **B. K. KIRKBY:**

A DYING man's appeal in a newspaper changed the whole course of my life.

I little thought how it would affect my life, when, on a bright spring morning of 1925, I called to see an old friend, who said, “Here is something which will interest you.” He handed me a copy of a county newspaper and pointed out an article headed, “Is there an After-World?”

It was written by George Jobson, a well-known scientist and world traveller, who, according to the address given, only lived about seven miles from me. I felt I could help this enquirer to prove for himself the truth he was seeking, as I had recently had some remarkable experiences myself.

I wrote and told him so, with the result that he sent for me to visit him, as he was bedridden and suffering with paralysis and cancer. He knew he had a lingering disease which gave him time for deep meditation.



GEORGE JOBSON

ALERT THOUGH AILING

I soon called on him, and found a keen, alert mind awaiting me, even if the body was broken. We had a long chat, and then I told him this story.

I am one of those fortunate men who had a wonderful mother, who was mother, friend, pal, confidante, all in one, to whom I could turn in any difficulty if I needed help.

Early in 1923, she was taken very ill with dropsy and cancer. The doctors pronounced her case incurable. I paid her a visit, which I felt was my last. Whilst sitting by her bedside, chatting over intimate things, a terrible longing came over me. If only I could keep her with me.

Suddenly, a thought flashed in my mind. Death *cannot* take my mother from me.

“Mother,” I said, “I feel you will not altogether leave me, if you are able to see me and understand when you are ‘up there.’ Will you tell me, dear?”

THE PACT

“Curious you should say that, my boy,” she replied, “but I feel that, too. If I can come back, and it is God’s will, I will do so.”

And so we said “Farewell.”

Shortly after she “went home” at sunset. I missed sorely the one who was so dear to me.

About four months later, I was driving a friend from the city, and stopped at a small village at her request for her to visit someone there. I waited some time. When the friend returned to the car, she told me of wonderful things an old woman told her relating to her private life!

Always being fond of something new, I said, “Oh! does the old woman tell fortunes. If so, I’m going in.”

This old woman apparently went to sleep, as I thought. I felt I was in for a long stay. Presently a voice—not like the old woman’s—spoke to me, and told me in endearing fashion it was Mother, returned, alive, happy, free from her terrible pain. She told me what her fatal illness was, and other details known only to us both.

“My boy, you must not keep this knowledge,” she said solemnly. “You must tell everyone.” I did, with the result my business acquaintances thought I was going insane. I went on obtaining more messages, until that morning when the article was shown me in the paper.

I watched my newly-found friend’s face as I told my story.

“If only I could speak to my mother,” he said at the close.

“You can if you will allow me to bring the medium my mother spoke through,” I replied.

MY OFFER DECLINED

But he wanted no “old woman” to tell him anything, and declined my offer. He admitted my story sounded remarkable. As he enjoyed my company, he invited me to come again.

He soon changed a little through my chats on my various proofs, until one day he asked me to bring the medium. I went fifty miles to fetch her in my car. When I took her to his bedside, before she could take her hat off, she was entranced. *His mother spoke and addressed him by her pet name for him, known only to himself and to her. She gave him proof after proof.*

“I must repay you for this most marvellous happening of my life,” he said. “I feel I can do this best by making a promise to you that when I return after so-called death I will endeavour to instruct you how to build an instrument to enable spirits to communicate with mortals. But I shall take over a call-sign for you to be certain it is I communicating.”

THE CALL-SIGN

After careful deliberation, he chose my three initials as his call-sign as they were rather uncommon. Only he and I knew of the compact.

I waited three months for this after his “death,” and it was given in a startling manner by a total stranger to me. I knew then I had to prepare for new work.

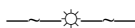
Gradually, I built up a regular line of communication through mediums with my friend, until at last he gave instructions how to build an instrument which he had promised.

This meant the biggest change of my life, because for twenty-five years I had been a successful businessman. This new friend said, "Sell all and do my work!"

A tall order? Well, it was, but I had faith in my man. I took the plunge.

My life's work results, financially, went into the construction of my new instruments. Years of anxious waiting took place before they worked. But they *do* work.

Hundreds of souls have cause to thank the writer of that chance article in that county paper, which has given them the glorious proof which I had, that Love is stronger than "Death."



Basil K. Kirkby was so taken with his meetings with George Jobson that it resulted in Kirkby taking up Jobson's suggestion *to build an instrument* after his death *to enable spirits to communicate*. Kirkby and Jobson decided on a *call-sign* so that Kirkby could be certain it was George Jobson communicating. The call-sign was Kirkby's three initials, "B.K.K." Reports suggested that Jobson, in life, worked as an engineer/scientist for the Graham Bell Telephone Company.

A few months after the death of George Jobson he communicated via a medium unknown to Kirkby using the agreed call-sign, B.K.K! So the work began between Kirkby and Jobson, which would in time closely involve two other people, firstly a physical medium, Mrs L. Singleton. Some reports state that Jobson died in 1930 but research would show that it was earlier, as the first of two machines made in collaboration between Jobson/Kirkby was up and running in early 1930! The first was called the "Reflectograph", then known as:

The Jobson-B.K.K. Reflectograph

It required ectoplasmic rods to be produced, gradually forming into a hand and arm needed to push the desired keys to produce the messages on the Reflectograph, which were flashed up on to a screen; the medium was Mrs L.E. Singleton and the alleged materialised arm/hand was that of one of Singleton's guides/controls, "Ethel". Shortly before Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's death on July 6th, 1930 Sir Arthur had shown much interest in the new invention but ill-health had severely restricted him

From		'Phone: Kensington 7688	
MR. B. K. KIRKBY MRS. L. E. SINGLETON			
Inventor and Demonstrators of the Reflectograph.			
"Lighthouse," Sleaford Lodge, WOODHALL SPA Lincolnshire.	42, Penywern Road, Earl's Court, LONDON, S.W. 5. 1 minute from Earl's Court Tube Station	"The George Jobson B.K.K. Reflectograph." An Instrument which demonstrates scientifically direct communication be- tween the so-called dead and the living. Demonstrations can be arranged by applying to the inventor, MR. B. K. KIRKBY. (Fee 10/6).	

From a letter to Sir Arthur on January 31st, 1930 from Kirkby and Singleton, their advertising, etc. of the Reflectograph was in use and being demonstrated, thus showing that George Jobson died prior to 1930. In the spring of 1930 a group was organised on both sides of the veil consisting of George Jobson, Basil Kirkby and his steward and partner, Mr A.J. Ashdown a psychical researcher who had carried out scientific work in the testing of instruments in many outlets of government research departments and the War Office. This body became known as

THE ASHKIR-JOBSON TRIANION



Ashdown was the technical adviser to the Trianion; the name ASHKIR is made up from **ASH**down / **KIR**kby = ASHKIR, with George Jobson as the leader of the Trianion group.

Below is quoted from “A Review of the work and aspirations of The Ashkir-Jobson Trianion – and some reflections by Mr. A. J. Ashdown”; the foreword is by the daughter of William Stead, Miss Estelle W. Stead, and is dated June 1st, 1931:

“There is no “sub-conscious element” with the Reflectograph; no validity in the feeble time-worn excuses of the pseudo-scientific or dogmatic blind sceptic. The Reflectograph is an instrument which is operated from the Beyond, and spells the spirit messages letter by letter when they are transmitted from the keyboard to the large alphabetical squares which light up clearly in view of all the sitters.

“No earthly finger touches the keys, and yet fingers do touch them!—fingers of a form of “force-matter” which at present can only be conceived by the metaphysician; vibrant with life—of clear form—visible—and yet of structure and possessing energy of a character so far completely beyond the ken of our scientists and physicists.

“The keyboard, or manual, of The Reflectograph is placed immediately in front of the cabinet in which, securely bound hands and feet, is seated the medium (Mrs. Singleton) in deep trance.

“After the opening hymn on the gramophone and invocation by Mr. Kirkby, there is a pause during which the spirit guides are building up the power, and the materialised hand of Ethel, the spirit operator of The Reflectograph, is forming. This hand plays over the keys and, after a few trial letters, the bell controlled by one of the keys rings out to signify that a start is being made.

“Then, under the dictation of the spirit communicating, the keys are pressed letter by letter at a rapid rate, and these close the electrical contacts and light up the letters on a large screen, placed against the wall away from the cabinet and in clear view of all the sitters.

“The bell rings between each complete word, and at the end of each message the blue star on the screen lights up to indicate that that particular message is finished, and that interlocution and conversation with the sender can be carried on.”

“To those who wish to prove the reality of the Life Beyond, with all its great consolation, and lofty ethical value on human conduct and life, a visit to the laboratories where the Reflectograph is demonstrated is nothing less than a duty.

“As for the “honest sceptic,”” he is on dangerous ground when he criticises, in future, without having seen this work.

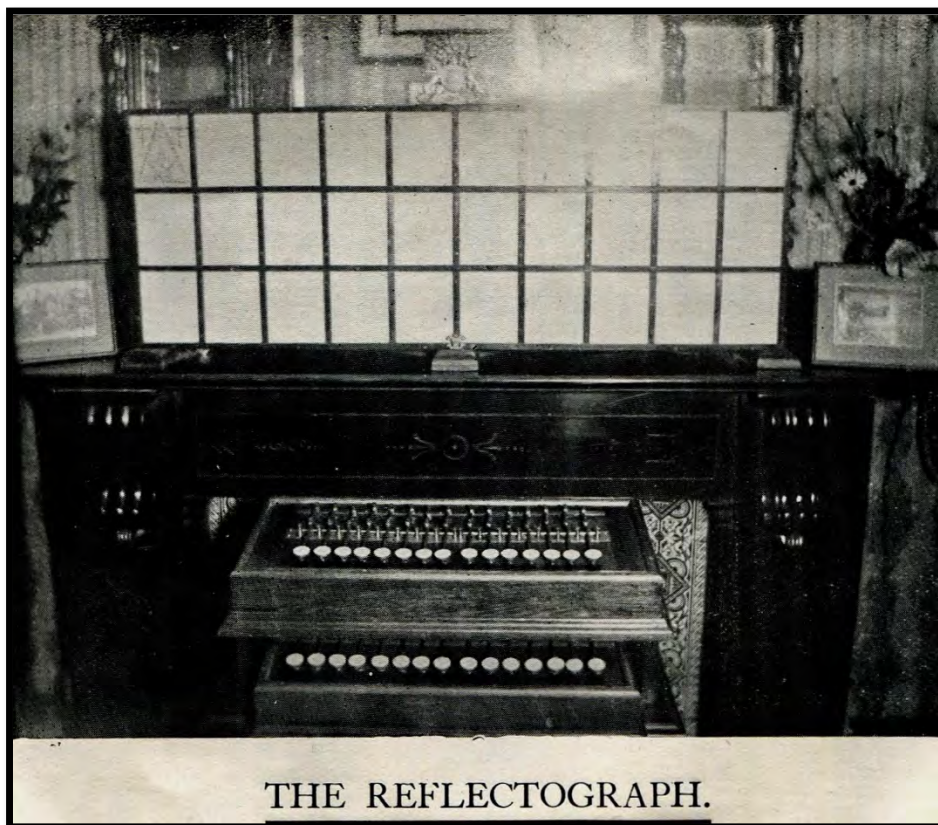
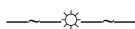
“To sympathetic earnest investigators is presented three forms of psychic phenomena:—

- (a) Spirit messages on the Reflectograph from friends or relatives—in the discretion of the guides.
- (b) An actual view of the materialised hand of Ethel; the spirit operator, and gallant little worker.
- (c) A spoken message by one of the guides (in many instances from George Jobson himself) to the sitters, through Mrs. Singleton in trance.

“In ordinary sittings the truth and inspiration which the Reflectograph gives has a value against which the contribution charged appears ridiculous and paltry. What price in money can adequately set against Conviction in this most important knowledge in the world ?

“It may, however, be mentioned for those investigators who like to carry out special tests in their own way, that these are not debarred as long as *it is explained clearly beforehand* what the tests are to be, and the sanction of the spirit guides is obtained. In the event of these special test conditions being carried through with success, the investigators must sign a statement indicating what the conditions were—and their satisfactory fulfilment.

“Furthermore, it is within the right of the wardens to charge such a contribution to the carrying on of the work for these special tests as will test also the bona fides of these hypercritical enquirers.”



It can be noted that it is in two tiers. The large screen was placed against a wall away from the cabinet for all to have a clear view of the messages.

The two images shown here show the entranced medium, Mrs L.E. Singleton, during a demonstration; it can be noted on the top image that it may appear to show the first signs of “force-matter” (ectoplasm) on Singleton’s lap. On the back of the second photograph it is noted: “The top row of the keys have been removed to give a clear view of the hand.” This shows the alleged materialised hand of “Ethel”.¹

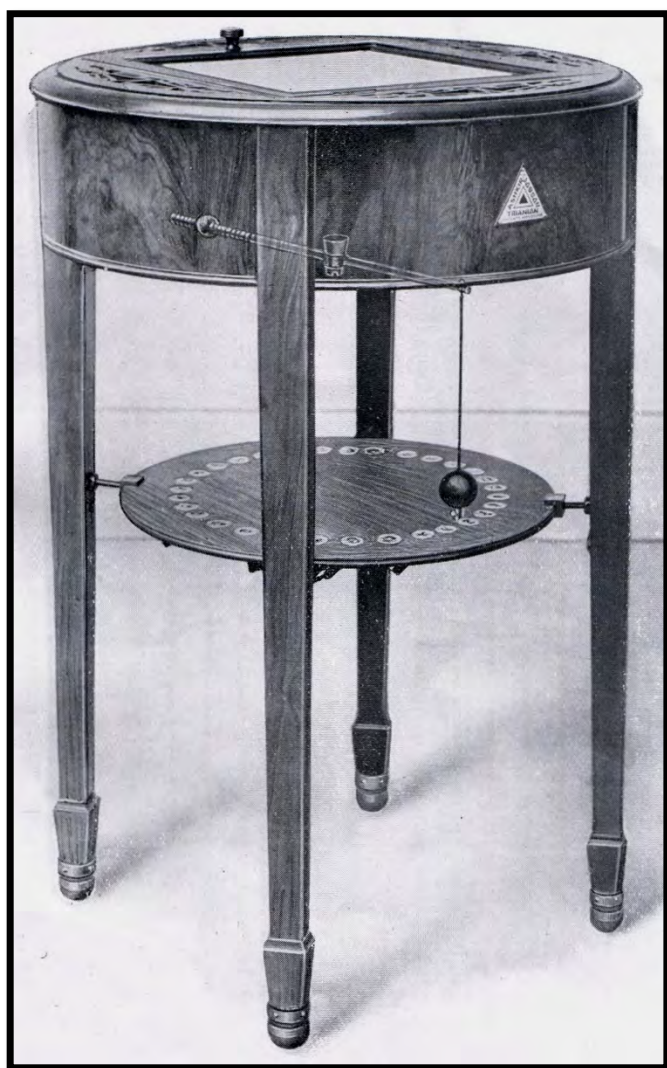


¹ It is unfortunate that a front photograph of the cabinet was not taken to show the medium with both arms secured and the *additional* phantom arm and hand.

The problem with the Reflectograph was that a materialisation medium was *necessary* to produce results; apart from the Singleton/Kirkby partnership I have not come across any other reports with other mediums of this era undertaking experiments. Perhaps the Reflectograph was not manufactured or only on a limited scale. Around 1931 came the second machine, the “Communigraph”, much improved inasmuch as no physical medium was required for its operation; the building of the second machine appears to be more of a combined effort of the “Ashkir-Jobson Trianon” group, whereas the Reflectograph was by Kirkby and Jobson.

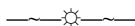
It can be noted that early in 1932 the Communigraph was still in its early stages; the quote below is taken from the Two Worlds, February 5th, 1932:

PROGRESS OF THE “COMMUNIGRAPH.”



The Canterbury Psychic Society was recently favoured by a visit from Mr. Kirkby and Mrs. Singleton, who reported the progress which the “Communigraph,” the new instrument for spirit communication, was making.

Mr. Kirkby stated that the instrument had been put to many tests. It was constructed in the form of a table. At the top there is a white glass screen. Underneath the screen are the letters of the alphabet, each letter being illuminated by a little electric lamp when the right contact is made. Below, about half-way down the legs, is the “dais” on which are the metal discs, or contacts. Suspended above them is a ball, whose orbit passes over this circle of contacts—32 in number.² The contacts are lettered, and when the ball is stopped immediately over the letter intended, it is pressed downwards by spirit forces (who use the power given off by the sitters), and the corresponding letter flashes on the screen. The words of the messages given from the other side are transmitted in this way, letter by letter, by the control, operating.



² This appears to be an error (unless the prototype had an extra contact), as there are thirty-one contacts around the dais consisting of the full letters of the alphabet with the additional signs, “yes”, “no”, interrogation, star (for indicating that a word is finished) and the bell which rings to signal the commencement and finishing of a complete communication.

These beautiful wooden table instruments were no doubt expensive; they were available only through the Ashkir-Johnson Trianion, which required one to be an associate member of the Trianion and supplied through certified branches of the Trianion. The Communigraph was designed for use in home circles, psychic development, and naturally for more advanced physical circles where trumpets, etc. were introduced. As previously noted, unlike the Reflectograph, which required the forming of a *materialised hand*, the Communigraph is worked by an invisible force drawn from the members of the circle, none of whom need to be of any great psychic development. The Communigraph was basically a ouija board but no physical contact at all was required by the sitters—this was done by the spirit operators using the Communigraph rather than through a person using a planchette or glass, etc. to receive the messages.³

How many were in production is not known; today I understand that the one in the Britten Museum and Library, housed at the Arthur Findlay College, Stansted Hall, is the only known surviving Communigraph. This valuable item was kindly donated in 1997 by Irene and Gerald Sowter of Reigate, Surrey, England.⁴ When I was appointed curator of the Britten Museum some nine years ago, I must confess it was not my priority, as I wanted to concentrate on making the Museum educational and uniting the Britten Library into the Museum, as was originally intended.

Another problem was that the Communigraph had no mains lead and no key to open to the lid; I removed the brass counterbalanced arm which is suspended from the chamber, brass pointer and wooden ball shown in the image above, so they were not damaged. The Britten Museum & Library Research Study Week in September 2019 was attended by two gentlemen, Dennis Bury and Alan Morris, from the “Survival Joint Research Committee Trust” (SJRCT), a charity founded in 1963, *exclusively concerned with the survival of human personality after bodily death*.

The SJRCT have strongly supported my work for around fifteen years in connection with my research and publication of *Psypioneer* and this journal, *Pioneer*. Dennis and Alan were interested in the Communigraph, which is displayed in the Museum, but I could tell them little, as I had never fully researched its full history, partly for the reasons already given. Alan Morris, a retired technician, contacted me and offered to repair the Communigraph, assisted by Sue Hussey.



³ See *Pioneer*, Vol. 6, No. 6: “ ‘Fifty Years’ Involvement within the Spiritualist movement – Paul J. Gaunt: Ouija Experience”.

⁴ Gerald and Irene had their own Healing Centre in Reigate and were very well respected for their work. Irene also worked as a trance medium; after Gerald’s death she carried on her healing work for a number of years until her passing, aged 91, on 7th August, 2012. More information is available, including a video of Irene working; use key word on Google: ‘Irene Sowter Reigate’.

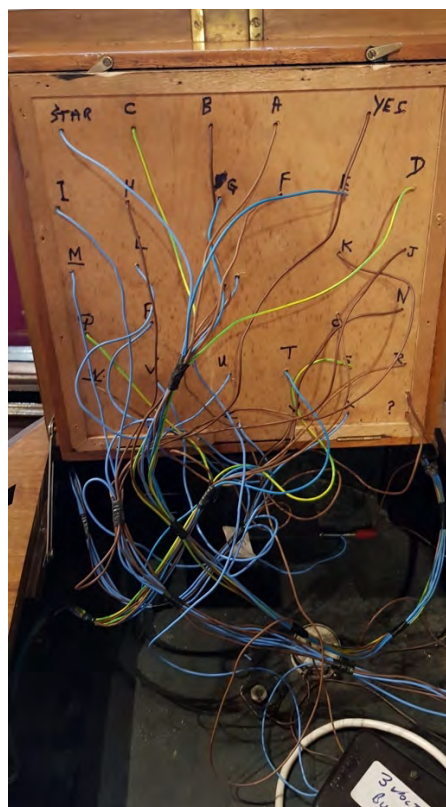
On contacting my predecessor, Duncan Gascoyne, former AFC Principal and SNU President, he told me that to his knowledge it had never been used at the College, so it appeared that the Communigraph had not been used for at least two decades. A key was eventually found by the AFC maintenance manager a month or so later. When Alan replaced the mains lead, it was found not to be working at all. As a result of a number of daylong visits to the College and painstakingly loving work the machine was restored.



All the brass discs on the dais were polished so as to make better electrical contact with the pendulum pointer and the dirt and grime in the gaps between the wooden carvings were cleaned out. All the copper strips were stripped of the black paint which they had been covered with and were covered, instead, with a thin smear of Vaseline to inhibit tarnishing while allowing good electrical contact. While screws were used to join the strips together, two of the strips had never been properly joined, relying entirely on them

being in close contact; they have now been screwed together. A full new set of thirty-five torch bulbs to light the letters, etc. was replaced.

The bulb-holders were found to be of a complicated arrangement, so in order to make them more serviceable the holes in the fibre washers were widened and tailored spade connectors were clamped to the wires where they connected to the holders. The remains of the old switch had to be removed and replaced with a new switch of similar design. Additional washers have been used where needed and the contact screws polished. The bell was not working because one of the connectors that plugged into it was broken; this was due to the wire from it being too short and



tugging on it whenever the lid was opened. A new connector was fitted along with a longer wire. The brass arm and pendulum arrangement were fully cleaned and the stiff grease in the bearing replaced by Vaseline, so that the arm now swings easily once the table is levelled. One of the leads which run down the table legs was not connected to the underside of the brass disc; this has now been rectified.



During sitting in development circles, attending séances and so forth, various methods have been used and adopted over many years to raise the all-important vibrations which are required for a platform in psychic, spirit communication. Gramophone records, hymns, Cockney songs like “Roll Out the Barrel”, conversation and laughter are some methods used.

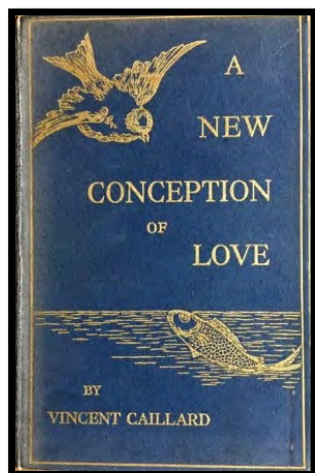
On this note it was realised by Alan and Sue that part of the essential operation of the Communigraph—according to the Trianion group the most vital and intrinsic part of the Ashkir-Johnson Communigraph—is the Vibrator or “Soul”.

Alan notes:

The Mechanical Vibrator was a clockwork instrument designed by spirit and built at much the same time as the Communigraph. According to the manual it generated a continuous tone of 214 beats/second – approximately equivalent to lower A in the musical scale. It was to be used with the Communigraph to supply the frequency needed by spirit when they were giving messages. But we have so far found no record of it ever being used, let alone its location. So, given the frequency and duration of the sound it generated, a CD has been made to imitate it and is now kept at the Britten Museum.

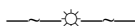


However, when the Communigraph was donated to the Britten Memorial Trust by Irene and Gerald Sowter in 1997, it included two séance record books, which shows that this Communigraph was used by the Ashkir-Jobson Trianion group, Kirkby and Singleton; some scans from the record books will be shown in the next issue of Pioneer.



Due to space any reader requiring more information, e.g. the procedure for operating the Communigraph, is asked to please contact the editor. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that in 1934 “A New Conception of Love” was published by Rider & Company; the book was compiled by Lady Zoe Caillard in 1933 following the death of her husband, Sir Vincent Caillard, in 1930, aged 73. Much of this book is written from Vincent Caillard’s own mind and according to the preface it was “Written on his Communigraph”, hence the book’s author is Vincent Caillard. The portrait of Basil K. Kirkby, shown above, and the images of Mrs L Singleton and the alleged spirit called Ethel are taken from this book.

The Britten Museum and Library and the General Manager of the Arthur Findlay College, Tanya Smith, wish to extend their gratitude and thanks to Alan Morris and Sue Hussey for their work in restoring this valuable “Communigraph”.



Below are two reports on Singleton materialisation séances. Her work as a materialisation medium needs further research; the reader can note that her colleague, Basil K. Kirkby, was present at both séances. The first séance, published below, is taken from the Two Worlds, February 26th, 1932. One of the signatories at the end supporting the report is R.F. Ermen: Miss Ermen was the Hon. Secretary of THE ASHKIR-JOBSON TRIANION and the séance was held at her address.

The second séance, held in Holland, is taken from the Two Worlds, August 19th, 1932; Singleton is noted as

“... a very frail person, who portrays no sign of possessing extraordinary gifts. She takes an animated part in conversation, and has a kindly word for everyone. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see that the phenomena of materialisation have left their traces on the body of the medium.”

It is interesting to note that at this séance a “...small vibrator to create vibrations was put in action in the room...”:

REPORTED FULL-FORM MATERIALISATIONS.

DEVELOPMENTS IN MRS. SINGLETON'S MEDIUMSHIP.

THE following record of a seance recently held at “The Beacon,” Wimbledon Park, London, will doubtless be of great interest to many readers,

Saturday, February 6th, was the twelfth birthday anniversary of Muriel, the little daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Singleton, who passed out when only half an hour old. It was also the birthday of a great friend, a lady in spirit. They had each asked for a special seance at. 8 pm. Eight sitters were present, and Mr. Bence, one of the sitters, saw Mrs. Singleton (the medium) fastened in her chair in the cabinet, with special metal bracelets provided by the Principal of the British College of Psychic Science. A good red light was burning throughout the seance.

Soon after the opening hymn and invocation, we saw first a small hand come through the opening of the cabinet, draped in filmy white substance, which waved to us all, and then rang a little bell hanging on the curtain. Then the curtain parted, and the childish form of Muriel appeared, calling out to her Daddy and to her little brother aged ten, who was also present. She held quite a long conversation with them, and asked them to come near the cabinet, when she kissed their hands. She also asked each sitter to shake hands and feel her robe, which was as fine as gossamer. As she shook hands with one sitter; her drapery clung to his hand, but dematerialised as he drew away from her. She accepted several presents which had been brought her, thanked everyone for them, and gave flowers to several sitters before she withdrew.

The next visitor was a little black girl named “IVY,” who helps Mrs. Singleton a great deal. She had jet black face and hands, and a very plain white dress, whereas Muriel's dress was all frills and daintily made. Ivy was full of fun. She showed her red tongue to everyone, and the whites of her eyes, asked for a red flower, played a toy piano, tore open a cracker, and placed a paper hat on her head, before disappearing into the cabinet.

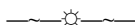
After a little time the tall form of a lady appeared. She was the second birthday guest. She called to her husband in the circle. He had brought her a powder box for her birthday. This was handed to her, and she took a tiny puff, and immediately used it in a way peculiar to herself whilst in earth life, She was tall and stately, and her face and figure very beautiful. Her robe was quite different in style to the two children's. She held a quiet

conversation with her husband, kissed him, and then retired, but said within the cabinet, "I want to come right out."

Then the curtains parted, and she stepped forward, holding her head high, and facing the light, so that all sitters could see her features clearly. The re-union between the two families was a joy to witness, and those present felt how sacred and beautiful the atmosphere was long after the iridescent presence had faded from physical vision.

We (the undersigned) declare the foregoing to be a true and accurate description of the seance. (Signed) W. A. BENCE, R. F. ERMEN, B. K. KIRBY, K. HUDDLE, RONNIE SINGLETON, RUSSELL A. FRANKS, R. E. SINGLETON, ROBERT COPLEY.

Mr. W. A. Bence, who was present at the above seance, writes us: "The materialisations were perfect in every detail. The lighting was good, and one could see every movement. As a matter of fact, I was afraid at first that there was too much light to get results."



MATERIALISATION IN HOLLAND

AN EVENING WITH MRS. SINGLETON AND MR. KIRKBY

By A. SPARENBURG (Editor of "Spirtische Bladen").

By kind invitation of Mr. van Walt I attended his house on Monday, May 16th, to take part in a materialising seance with the English medium, Mrs. Singleton. I was accompanied by Mr. Lys, the well-known Dutch medium.

My attitude of mind was certainly sceptical. I know the difficulty and rarity of the Phenomena which we were expecting (no less than the entire materialisation of spirit apparitions that were capable of coming out of the cabinet and speaking and shaking hands with sitters, etc.): nevertheless, the name of Mrs. Singleton gave me sufficient confidence to be sure that I was going to witness something out of the ordinary. In the reception room of Mr. van Walt we were introduced to Mrs. Singleton and Mr. Kirkby (who supports her at all seances).

The medium is a very frail person, who portrays no sign of possessing extraordinary gifts.



She takes an animated part in conversation, and has a kindly word for everyone. Nonetheless, it is not difficult to see that the phenomena of materialisation have left their traces on the body of the medium.

When the assembly had been completed we went upstairs into the special seance room. This contained a dark cabinet, around which the sitters were grouped. Between the ring of sitters and the cabinet there would be three to four yards of free space. Mrs. Singleton was next secured in her chair in the cabinet. The fastening was with bracelets fitted with a chain lock, which I understand has proved to be the most secure form of fastening, and is not capable of being fraudulently opened. Further, a cord was fastened round the waist of the medium, taken through the back of the chair, and fastened behind. The cabinet was a small square partition built up of black material. The medium occupied a small portion of it, leaving sufficient space for the building up of the ectoplasmic forms.

When all was in readiness I was placed in a position to control the medium, being within easy touch of the fastenings and the contents of the cabinet, which was empty, with the exception of a toy horse, which had been placed there by Mr. and Mrs. van Walt, and had formerly belonged to their departed daughter.

The white light was now extinguished, and one red light placed over the back of the cabinet remained. This, however, gave enough radiance to enable me to look at my watch, and see that the time was 8-40 when the seance started. A small vibrator to create vibrations was put in action in the room, and the gramophone then played a hymn, Mr. K. took an illuminated cross, and, holding this up before the entrance of the cabinet (the curtains being closed), offered a prayer for the success of the evening, and for the protection of the medium and sitters. Another hymn followed. After some waiting a voice was heard in the cabinet saying "I am coming." Mr. K. spoke some encouraging words, "Come on—it is all good here," etc. Next a hand appeared between the opening of the curtains, followed by part of an arm. It was draped with a kind of tulle veil, hanging at least thirty centimetres from the arm. The hand looked frail and transparent, but was solid to the touch, feeling like a human hand. It gave off a glowing light, and might be compared to a metal hand heated to a white glow. The hand then drew back, and a soft voice came from the cabinet, saying "I want a flower." A flower was held before the opening of the curtain by Mr. K. This was taken by a spirit hand, and a moment later presented to Mrs. van Walt.

FORM IN FULL VIEW.



Once more the voice spoke, "I am coming," and now the curtains were quietly separated, and a full figure appeared, fully formed from feet to head. It was the apparition of Ethel, the medium's control. It was a very wonderful experience, Ethel said "Can you see me?" in a soft voice. The form was of medium height, and entirely enveloped in tulle drapery, which on the top of the head was worked into a graceful hood, like a bridal toilet. The bare feet, however, were clearly visible. Standing there in full view of the sitters, the form said, pointing to Mr. Kirkby, "That gentleman does magnificent work." Mr. K. entreated her to come out of the cabinet. Once more she appeared at the entrance, only, however, to disappear. Later the voice was again heard, "I want to shake hands with the gentleman who gives so much power." The curtain opened. The same spirit appeared at the entrance, but now she advanced a step and offered her hand. It was

seized and gently pressed by Mr. L., who testified that it felt soft and warm.

Once more Ethel manifested in the perfectly materialised form, and invited Mrs. Th. van O. to shake her by the hand, which was done. Mrs. Th. van O. declared that the tulle felt so soft and fine to the touch that it was difficult to compare it to any earthly material. Ethel then disappeared into the cabinet. The impression she left was that of a charming young girl of about sixteen years of age and beautiful features. Though the face was not too clearly seen she looked very much like the photographs I have seen of Katie King made by Sir William Crookes during his researches.

The next form to appear was a little negro girl of seven to eight years of age, appearing at the entrance of the cabinet. The dark face showed very strongly against the white drapery. She was a lively little thing, and full of temperament, and she laughed typically at various things which were said and done. Mr. Th., who knows the negro race from intimate association, said that this particular laugh was characteristic of just such a negro child. While she stood at the entrance she said she wanted to play the piano. Mr. K. handed me a tiny toy piano, and I personally held it against the curtains of the cabinet after the apparition had retired into it. Soon the curtains reopened, and the full figure of the child came. I held the piano before her, and the tiny black fingers strummed on the keys, so that all present could see her. I looked the apparition square in the eyes, of which the whites stood out very vividly. I clearly saw the eyes moving, and all present could hear the notes of the piano as the fingers strummed them. Mrs. Z. offered the form a little cap, which she put on.

She seemed to take great pleasure in displaying herself in it, and we could hear her laugh inside the cabinet. When the negro girl (Ivy) had disappeared, another voice was heard in the cabinet speaking in Dutch. Very clearly we heard the words "Ik kom." A little hand appeared and tremulously drew back. Again we heard the voice speaking, and Mr. and Mrs. van Walt recognised the voice as being wonderfully like that of their daughter Grace, who passed over at the age of seven. (At a previous seance Grace had promised to manifest if possible.) Again we heard the voice say "IK kom. Give me a flower for Violet (her sister)." Mr. K. offered her a flower, which was taken by the hand of the spirit. The curtain then opened, and the charming figure of a child appeared, and gave the flower to her mother, who was sitting next to the cabinet. She also stammered some words, but was overcome with emotion at seeing her parents so nearby. The voice ended in a touching treble, and she disappeared. Shortly afterwards, however, she again returned, whispered some words like "Mama, papa," and stretched out her hands to her parents, and these were gratefully pressed by Mr. and Mrs. van Walt. She then disappeared into the cabinet.

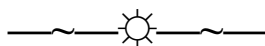
It is difficult to see whether the figure goes back into the cabinet or dissolves between the curtains. I can state of the feet of this last apparition that they passed from visibility to invisibility in a fraction of a second.

THE VOICE FROM OVERHEAD

Following Grace's disappearance, a heavy man's voice resounded from the cabinet. Mr. K. said it was the voice of a Zulu chief, who in broken English gave several explanations of the phenomena. The seance practically finished with this phenomenon, but whilst the heavy voice (which formed such a marked contrast to that of the medium) was still heard in the cabinet, I was invited to go inside with a red light and investigate, I found the medium huddled on the chair, hanging in the cord that was bound round the waist. I could not withhold a feeling of pity and appreciation, realising how much this lady is doing to convince people of the reality of materialisation. While I was examining the wristlet bands and the rope, finding all intact, the voice of the Zulu kept resounding above me. I stood up, and within about twenty centimetres above my head I heard the

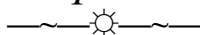
voice continuously talking in the top of the cabinet. It was the most extraordinary sensation I have ever experienced to be able to hear this voice above my head and be unable to see anyone.

It was 10-15 when the seance ended, and we all went downstairs, where, after a few minutes, the medium joined us, exhausted but full of courage. All thanks should be given to Mrs. Singleton and Mr. Kirkby. Untiringly experimenting, they appear to be under the guidance of their spirit friends, who create conditions that make it possible to produce powerful manifestations. A word of thanks also to Mr. and Mrs. van Walt for giving an opportunity to Dutch investigators to attend the experiments of this gifted medium. It was an unforgettable evening.



‘HET JOHAN BORGMAN FONDS’

Dutch Spiritualism



On two previous occasions Pioneer has asked Drs Wim H. Kramer to update us on Dutch Spiritualism.⁵ Wim is the Managing Director of the Dutch foundation, ‘Het Johan Borgman Fonds’, founded by Mr. Johan Borgman (1989-1976) in 1969. Wim and his colleagues’ valuable and dedicated work is ongoing in bringing Spiritualist history – 1880-2015 – in the Netherlands available to everyone who can visit the archive in Utrecht on weekdays during office hours free of charge.



Pioneer asked Wim for some information on their historic premises in downtown Utrecht.

Given the above article:

“A Means of Spirit Communication – Designed from the Spirit World!”

What artefacts does the Foundation hold in its museum as a means of spirit communication, e.g. ouija boards, planchettes, etc. and any mechanical devices, e.g. Ghost Light?

Drs Wim H. Kramer’s reply:

Our building is in downtown Utrecht in the part of the city where in 47 BC the Romans had an army camp.⁶ The foundations of the building itself date from medieval times. Since May 1922 it has been the premises of the Utrecht Spiritist society. A small exception: between Spring 1943 and Liberation Day on May 5th, 1945 there was an interruption due to German legislation which forbade all ‘spiritual’ activities. This law was actively pursued by the German occupation forces, meaning that all over the Netherlands they confiscated every book, journal and document. Even university libraries were scrutinised. The Utrecht building was handed over to a German-friendly family. Two days after Liberation Day the Utrecht Spiritists removed that family and turned it back to its spiritual use. Today the interior is largely still the same as it was in 1946.



⁵ Vol. 5, No. 3: “Readers’ response to: Spiritualist Healers of the Past: John Britnell – Father of Dutch Spiritualism” & Vol. 5, No. 4: “Rescue the History of Dutch Spiritualism”.

⁶ Showing the outside of the building as it is today (the same as back in 1922), and a snapshot of the Library room. It used to be a big library but is now more for reading and experimenting. See the ouija board on the table ready for use. The actual library is now part of the Archive project and is publicly available through the Utrecht Archive and the National Royal Dutch Library in The Hague.



Over the past years we were able to maintain the collection, thanks to gifts of other “Harmonia” chapters in Holland and from individuals who handed over materials that once belonged to their Spiritist grandparents and were used in séances to communicate with the world beyond the veil.

The Utrecht collection holds amongst many other items an original ‘Ghost Light’ dating from the late 1930s, an extremely rare tool for communicating with the spirit world.

As a matter of fact it is not a device to communicate but a tool to decide whether the time is right for having a séance.

Since the late 19th century it is common knowledge that some séances are successful and others do not give any sign from the spirit world at all. Spiritist researchers tried to find a reason for this. Of course the ‘spiritual power’ of the medium was an enormously important factor but, still, even good mediums had sometimes less or no results.

So by the end of the 19th century investigators concluded that the darkness, a good spiritual atmosphere, singing spiritual religious songs, sitting in a circle and holding hands, etc. were helping the spirits to come through. However, even when all these factors were in place, communication with the spirit world still often failed. Someone concluded that since spirits are of human origin, like all humans on earth, they might not always be in the mood or around for communication with the people trying to hold a séance. Someone also noted that when séances were going well the sitters could feel a cold airstream on their necks. So perhaps this airstream was an indication that spirits were around and willing to communicate.



In the 1933 volume of the Dutch Spiritist journal, ‘Spiritische Bladen’, Mr De Boer reported on the ‘Call Bell’, an invention by a 15-year-old Belgian boy, who died on July 31st, 1929 and gave his father in December 22nd of that year, using a ouija board, detailed instructions on how to construct this Call Bell. By 1931 this device was available on the market. Soon Spiritists in Holland started to experiment with this device and reported on successes in the Spiritist journal. The device detects the very light airstream that triggers a sensitive electrical contact to make the connected electric bell ring. In the 1936

volume of the Dutch Spiritist journal a long article was published on how to contract such a bell at home.

The device became known under different names such as ‘Call Bell’, ‘Contact Bell’ and ‘Ghost Bell’, analogous to someone who rings the front doorbell in order to enter a house. This device became quite popular for some time in Holland in the 1930s. Reports in Dutch Spiritist journals were very positive: ‘It never fails.’ However, the bell makes a

lot of noise, so someone replaced the bell with a light: Ghost Light. In the July 15, 1936 issue of the Dutch Spiritist Journal, 'Spiritische Bladen', a detailed article was published on how to build a 'Ghost Light' oneself at home.

The Ghost Light in our collection is clearly based on information given in the 1936 article. When the scale is in balance, no electrical contact is made and thus the light is off. If an airstream passes the room, the scale will tilt and the light will flash on. Our device originally used a dry battery but this was later replaced – as suggested in the 1936 article – by a mains transformer. It also has the option of connecting an external electric bell next to the light bulb.



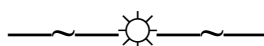
Unfortunately we have no original reports on the performance of our 'Ghost Light'.

**For further details and information on
'Het Johan Borgman Fonds' and access to
its archives, etc. please contact Drs Wim H.
Kramer by e-mail:**

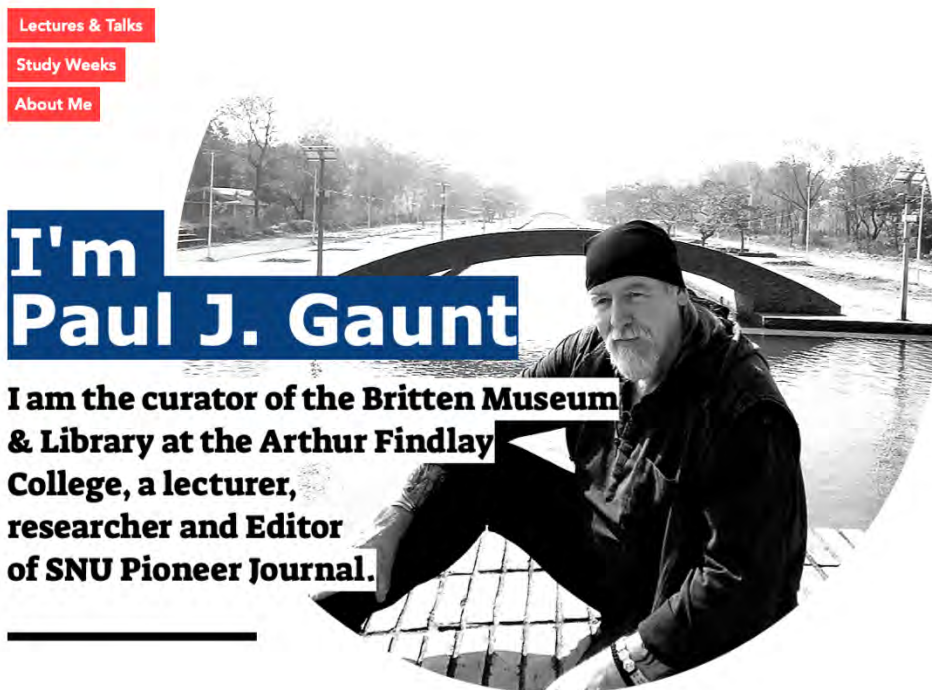
info@hjbfnl



*The photograph is of Wim Kramer
discovering historical spiritual documents
in 2015 that were hidden for over half a century in the mantelpiece*



New One-stop Website:



www.pauljgaunt.com

The home page gives a direct link to all the back copies of "Pioneer"; subscribe free, etc.

The home page links to:

Lectures on the History of the Spiritualist Movement with some specialist subjects.

Study Weeks at the Arthur Findlay College as advertised elsewhere in this journal, with a link to book and further information



This page also has some free downloads of the factual information on
"Hydesville"

"SNU Seven Principles"

Primarily advisable for the SNU educational courses

Also, a link to all "Pyspioneer" issues often referenced in Pioneer

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Research Material

Hydesville

S.N.U. Seven Principles

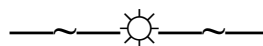
The Vagrancy Act S.N.U.

S.N.U. History

Other Research Materials

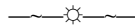
Research Material

-  [Arthur Findlay College](#)
-  [Britten Museum & Library](#)
-  [Churches & Societies](#)
-  [General Interest](#)
-  [J. Arthur Findlay](#)
-  [Pioneer Mental Mediums](#)
-  [Psychic/ Spirit Art](#)
-  [Psychic/ Spirit Photography](#)
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-  [Healing & Healers](#)
-  [Physical Mediumship](#)
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HARRY EDWARDS

For 15 years Edwards did not know which spirit guides were using him



Harry Edwards has been featured numerous times in Pioneer and all the healing articles are now available in one searchable pdf, “Healing & Healers”; please see “New One-stop Website” elsewhere in this issue. Below is taken from the Two Worlds, March 9th, 1957:

FAMOUS SURGEON AIDS HEALER FROM BEYOND

He proves his identity through two mediums

THE British Medical Association, which has attacked Harry Edwards and tried to explain away all his healing cures, will not be pleased to learn that guiding and helping this medium from the spirit world is one of the greatest surgeons—Lord Lister.

Moreover the man who introduced the antiseptic system, which revolutionised modern surgery, is helped by Louis Pasteur, another distinguished medical figure. Indecently Pasteur was a Roman Catholic. His spirit help for a healer will not please his former Church which hates Spiritualism. It is significant that Lister was led to the discovery of antiseptics by experiments based on Pasteur’s researches.



What is the proof ?

What is the evidence that Lister, whose discovery was hailed as “the greatest triumph of modern surgery,” is co-operating with Edwards ? Pictorial proof is given on this page. And there is corroborative evidence.

For 15 years Edwards did not know which spirit guides were using him. Then when he launched into public healing and also began to achieve remarkable cures at his sanctuary, he tried to find out. Besides so many patients had asked him.

It was to Frank Leah, that brilliant psychic artist, he turned, without disclosing any hint of what he sought. Their conversations were conducted by telephone.

Leah, at first, was conscious of a group influence, from which two distinct personalities emerged. The artist said he would not put pencil to paper until further confirmation came.

Pasteur, too

Two months later Leah telephoned Edwards to say that these two figures had shown themselves clearly to him. He described them in detail and gave their names which he had clairaudiently received—Lister and Pasteur.

Their descriptions were similar to those Edwards had been given by clairvoyants, but this was the first time their names had been mentioned. As the healer had no idea what Pasteur and Lister looked like, he could not confirm the descriptions given by the artist.

They agreed to let the matter stand over for a while. Edwards began to feel that his quest would peter out. Leah had already mentioned that Lister was the chief influence and Pasteur the secondary one, though they worked together.

Within 24 hours, unexpected confirmation came. Edwards had gone to dedicate a new church opened by A. W. Austen and his wife Paulette.⁷ Afterwards, during tea and general conversation, Paulette beckoned to the healer. Clairvoyantly, she said, she saw spirit forms with him.

Edwards took out his pen and an old envelope to make notes. First she described a bearded man, saying he was a surgeon with great powers of concentration, of French nationality, whose work was connected with glandular research and microbes.

Writes the name

She described a laboratory in detail, said she got the letter “P,” which was followed by her statement. “He was responsible for finding the cure for rabies.” Then she took the healer’s pen and envelope and wrote the name, Pasteur.

Then Paulette referred to a second personality, “your principle healing guide.” She referred to his study of gangrene, said he was a British surgeon, a great research worker, and a lecturer. After a while she broke off and sniffed as if assailed with a pungent smell which she said was like disinfectant.

“He found a way of preventing gangrene and of putting people to sleep,” she said. After getting the initial “L,” she said she was impressed with the name Lister.

Edwards was so elated that he went straight to Leah’s studio on the off chance of finding him in. The healer said he had now received the supporting evidence the artist wanted and told him the story.

When Edwards had finished, Leah went to the easel and in his presence made a sketch. returning home, the healer found in a children’s encyclopædia a picture of Lister, which tallied with Leah’s sketch.

No doubt about it

Edwards paid two more visits to Leah while he completed his drawing. Every line was done in the healer’s presence. When the psychic portrait was completed, the healer showed Leah for the first time a photograph of Lister that he found. There was no doubt about Lister having proved his identity.

This irrefutable evidence shows that some medical men, despite death, still labour to help suffering humanity.

Further added:

Fleet Street could find only this

USUALLY when we reproduce a Frank Leah drawing we publish alongside it a comparative picture to show you how the psychic artist has captured the likeness. The youthful picture of Lord Lister which you see is the most appropriate we could find after an intensive search.

⁷ A.W. (Billy) Austen, assistant editor (later editor) at Psychic News; during this period he sat in the Hannen Swaffer home circle. There were two official stenographers of the teachings of Silver Birch: the first was A.W. (Billy) Austen and he was followed by Frances Moore, a lady whom Silver Birch always called “*the scribe*” and who would serve until Barbanell’s death on July 17th, 1981 at the age of 79.

You see the same individual as he showed himself in old age to Leah, and as a young man, though in both pictures he has his characteristic parting, side whiskers, collar and bow.

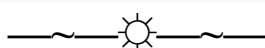
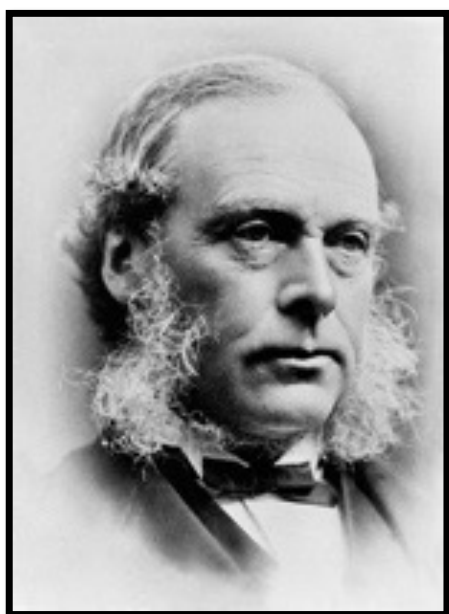
The National Portrait Gallery could not help us in our search for a comparative portrait; nor could the Lister Institute. The Royal College of Surgeons has a portrait which we examined, but it was not suitable for our purpose. The photographic library of the leading picture newspaper in this country had nothing.

Finally “Picture Post” library, which prides itself on the finest and largest collection of photographs, produced four of Lister. But not one of them was really comparable with the psychic portrait. Incidentally, these included a photograph of Lister and Pasteur addressing a meeting of the Paris Sorbonne. We have published the one that seemed the most suitable.

The net result of our research is a striking tribute to Leah’s mediumship. He produced a life-like drawing of Lister—yet there is no copy possessed by the expected sources that we tried.



Joseph Lister (1827-1912) was a British surgeon and a pioneer of antiseptic surgery



Spiritualism has been rich in psychic and spirit art from its earliest days. Its presentation has undergone many phases, from Wella and Pet Anderson in America, to David Duguid in Scotland in direct and trance art, to the first demonstration of recognisable spirit portraits of family members and friends by Frank Leah, to symbolic art, known better today as Auragraphs and pioneered by Harold Sharp. Pioneer has featured numerous psychic/spirit artists and all articles pertaining to this subject can now be downloaded on one pdf; see “New One-stop Website” elsewhere in this issue.

*One very rare form of psychic art is missing from this list
– Precipitated paintings*



THE BANGS SISTERS



Elizabeth, known as Lizzie, and Mary, known as May, collectively known as the Bangs Sisters, are best known today for their stunning precipitated paintings; I have refrained from adding their birthdates, as the various sources are most contradictory.

From their early childhood they exhibited many forms of mediumship, including materialisation, clairvoyance, automatic writing, slate-writing, etc. It would appear that they did not start their precipitated paintings, or at least publicly demonstrate them, until the

latter part of 1894, as most reports suggest, which would bring the sisters to fame and envy.

However, their earlier mediumship was brought into serious question in 1888 with a claim of fraud levied against the Bangs family.

The Religio-Philosophical, a weekly journal, was founded in 1865 by Stevens Sanborn Jones. In 1877 Jones was shot twice in his office, situated in room 16 of the Religio-Philosophical Publishing House Building, No. 394, Dearborn Street, Chicago. Control of the Religio-Philosophical Journal was assumed on Mr Jones's death by his son-in-law and former business manager, Colonel John Bundy (1841-1892). Bundy published on April 7th, 1888 "The Bangs' Fall from Grace".⁸

Bundy noted:

*The great body of Spiritualists are more unrelenting toward fraud practiced
under the cloak of Spiritualism and better able to detect it than outsiders
possibly can be*

⁸ As noted in the recent series in Pioneer, "A Question of Fraud!", the British Spiritualist press was committed to stamping out fraud; this also extended to the American Spiritualist press.

A short quote below:

On Sunday evening last, while several societies in this city were celebrating the fortieth anniversary of Modern American Spiritualism, and all the churches were filled to overflowing with people who thronged them to hear the beautiful music and witness the floral display, a very different scene was in progress at the home of the Bangs Sisters on Walnut street. While church bells were ringing, organs pealing forth joyful anthems and trained voices filling the air with triumphant strains in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus, the Bangs women, mother and daughters, were busily engaged in the cold-blooded, damnable, unutterably vile business of running a bogus materialization show. With a music box making noise enough to drown all other sounds and Mrs. Bangs ever on the alert with her cracked voice to fill up any hiatus of the machine music, the daughters went through the sickening swindle with all the coolness of well-trained performers. Heedless of friendly admonition, intent only upon securing the forty to sixty dollars per week which the swindle was bringing in, this female trio, mother and daughters, persisted in their diabolical business; blinded by their avarice and feeling the confidence bred of long success in eluding exposure and deluding seekers after evidences of the continued existence of their beloved dead, these women went on with their nefarious work until the experience which must come sooner or later to all evildoers overtook them. Nemesis was on their trail disguised as D. F. Trefry, and though they were suspicious of him, their overweening confidence in their ability to circumvent an exposure led them to court danger and defy detection. Here is Mr. Trefry's statement of the exposure, condensed as much as possible by omitting vivid descriptions of the dramatic, almost tragic, details of the scene:

Having secured the assistance of two policemen and several friends, I proceeded with them to the Bangs Sisters, 22½ Walnut St., on Sunday evening last, to attend a séance. There were about thirty persons present. I sat in the front row where I had an opportunity to carefully inspect the proceedings. The two policemen were seated in the third row, and the friends accompanying me were compelled to stand back of them, there being no seats for them.

May Bangs occupied one apartment of the cabinet, being locked therein, there being a thin cloth partition between the medium and the apartment where the spirits were supposed to materialize. Five or six figures appeared purporting to be materializations, some of which were recognized as spirit friends by the gullible people present. Then Belle, one of the principal cabinet spirits came, dressed in white, with white pearl buttons, and stood in the cabinet with the door partially open.

Then forms appeared, after which the celebrated Russian Princess came and stood in the partially opened door of the cabinet, dressed in white, trimmed with what was stated by Mrs. Bangs, the mother of the mediums, to be precious diamonds. She wore a white head-dress bespangled like the dress. There was a signal agreed upon by me and my friends, which I gave when the auspicious moment arrived for making the exposure, and at the same time I made a sudden spring and caught the Princess just before she got the door closed, and I did not release my hold until she was taken before those present, some sixty ladies and gentlemen, with her toggery still upon her, and held by me and my assistants; and when this was torn off of her, the medium, May Bangs, was revealed, dressed the same as she was when she first entered the cabinet. She had in her possession a bundle of paraphernalia, consisting of robes, scarfs, false beards, etc. The mother, fighting to release her, grabbed the bundle, and tried to carry it off, but was intercepted by one of the policemen, who took it from her.⁹

⁹ Further noted: It may be well however to say a word about the trick cabinet. This cabinet is large and divided into two compartments. As it stands with the sitters facing it, the compartment for the medium is to the right and is only about one half the dimensions of the other one, used by the "spirits." The partition is of thin but strong

The friends of the mediums were so pugnacious that the policemen were compelled to flourish their revolvers in order to maintain order. After, however, the mediums were arrested, their paraphernalia exposed, and the condition of the cabinet shown to be such that fraud could be easily practiced, those who were loudest in denunciations of their arrest, were glad that it had occurred.

The patrol wagon was summoned and when the mediums were taken out to it, there were about 150 people on the sidewalk, who expressed themselves as highly pleased, at the result, for the show had got to be a dreadful nuisance.

However, Bundy does give us some valuable information on their early life and as mediums: “May and Lizzie Bangs”, reprinted from the Chicago Herald in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, April 7, 1888:

“Colonel John C. Bundy, editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, yesterday consented to give *The Herald* some interesting revelations touching the Bangs sisters and their methods. He says the girls first came to his notice as mediums about eighteen years ago. Lizzie is twenty-nine. She was married some years ago to one Paul, a letter-carrier, Colonel Bundy adds: “Lizzie obtained a divorce for good cause, as I am informed, and with her two little children, girls, returned to her father’s home. May is twenty-six years old, and also divorced; has a little boy about three years old, and lives with the parents. In the early years of their alleged mediumship marvelous stories were told of the phenomena occurring in their presence and about the house. The respectability of the family and the apparent sincerity of the father carried much weight, and the stories were quite generally credited. Soon public ‘circles’ were given under the auspices of the parents, and a fee was charged.

“Gradually the demonstrations increased in variety and complexity. Nearly eleven years ago, at the earnest solicitation of Mr. Paul, who was then, as I suppose, engaged to Lizzie, I witnessed several of their ‘dark séances’ for physical manifestations. The conditions were unsatisfactory in that the observer could never be sure that the girls were not assisting. As such exhibitions have no scientific value and are useless where certainty is essential, I declined to pursue the matter.”

“Prior to two years ago I did not allow the names of the Bangs sisters to appear on the mediums’ directory which I furnish investigators, nor did I mention them in the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, to the best of my recollection. Some time after the formation of the Psychical Research Society in this city the girls called on me and offered to submit their claims as mediums for independent slate-writing to the investigation of the society’s committee on physical phenomena. They appeared ingenuous, and anxious to obtain a standing in the *Journal* and with the society.”

The full report is available to any interested parties in pdf; please contact the editor. It is interesting to note a leading comment by Bundy:

From my own observations and the reports of credible informants I had by this time reached the conclusion, much against my inclination, that Mrs. Bangs was master spirit of the business. I then ceased to have any further interest in the mediumistic claims of the family and knew little of its history for some years.¹⁰

muslin nailed to two pieces of hard wood, one on either side, about an inch thick and two inches wide. These extend from bottom to top of the cabinet, and are secured by iron sockets and bolts. The whole thing looks honest and only an experienced investigator familiar with the construction of trick boxes would be able to detect the swindle. By the use of a small wrench, its head covered with chamois skin to deaden sound, and the removal of three screws which had no hold on the wood and could be instantly removed, the materializer could in a minute remove the wooden strip at the rear of the cabinet and have free access to the other compartment. After the show it could all be replaced in another minute.

¹⁰ Mrs Meroe Bangs, their mother, died on November 2nd, 1917.

There are numerous unsavoury reports of this era, no doubt giving the media much fuel surrounding the then called “Notorious Bangs Sisters”, with five failed marriages between the two sisters in their early life. As noted in the Pioneer’s three-part series ending in the last issue, “A Question of Fraud!”, apparent fraud is not always as it appears on the surface; in addition, the local and national non-Spiritualist newspaper articles of the day often had *sensationalised headlines* and generally knew nothing of the mediumistic processes, albeit the comments of the editor of the Religio-Philosophical, John Bundy, require respect as an experienced Spiritualist investigator and editor of the respected journal.

PRECIPITATED PAINTINGS

As previously noted, precipitated paintings, which the Bangs Sisters started in the latter part of 1894, were unlike David Duguid’s direct art, which were done in total darkness with oils or watercolour, with the paints present on the table; precipitated paintings were different. They were produced in direct view of the sitter or sitters, with the portrait of the deceased slowly and gradually appearing on the canvas, sometimes the details of the portrait being altered, as in life our image changes—long hair, short hair, moustache and/or a beard, clean-shaven, etc. It is reported that the precipitated image would change when sitters would remark (sometimes mentally) that at that age they did not have a beard, so the image was said to change, reshaping the image.

The finished paintings were without doubt stunning. During my time at Lily Dale in July 2019 it was the first time I had viewed original precipitated paintings displayed in Lily Dale museum and the Maplewood Hotel, Marion Skidmore Library, NSAC office.¹¹ The paintings were produced by Lizzy and May Bangs and by Allen Campbell and Charles Shourds, known famously as the “Campbell Brothers”. To my knowledge these are the only known mediums to demonstrate precipitated work. The paintings of the Bangs and Campbells are indeed very similar. The photograph of myself and Museum Curator Ron Nagy shows some of the beautiful displayed works in Lily Dale museum. Ron himself cannot be certain with some of them whether or not they were produced by the Bangs or the Campbells!



The Bangs and Campbell paintings are indeed similar, as noted, but totally unlike other paintings produced through other forms of art mediumship, as in the case of precipitated paintings, for example, there are no eyelashes, the eyes are vibrant and there is a feeling of being alive and deep. There are no brush strokes similar to an image produced by modern-day airbrushing. Reports show that when the paintings were produced they were damp to the touch and vibrant in colours, which would rub off with one's finger, feeling like soot or powder or oily.

¹¹ See Pioneer, Vol. 6, No. 4: “Ron Nagy, Museum Curator at the Lily Dale Assembly”.

The Bang Sisters rented various properties at Lily Dale during the summer months for a number of years, whereas the Campbell Brothers owned a property and lived at Lily Dale. Allen Campbell and Charles Shourds, the “Campbell Brothers”, will be covered in a later issue of Pioneer.

Sometimes, as in the case of Frank Leah, and with psychic photography at the end of the sitting the sitter would produce a photograph of their loved one or friend—being the same or similar to the image produced by the medium. With the sisters the image was close to the produced photograph but, for example, the hands were repositioned; perhaps the hat was missing or a badge on the lapel or on a dress would be added or missing—but yet identified by the sitter as belonging to the person in the painting at some point in their life.

This brings in similar problems as in psychic photography, whereby it was considered that in some cases the psychic image was projected on to the film emulsion by some form of *ectoplasmic overlay*, as it was generally agreed that the alleged spirit form did not pose for the photograph. Psychic photography was one of the most controversial phenomena in the Spiritualist movement. The Bangs Sisters had problems with hostile press, the authorities, and critics whose comments and accounts—for *non-psychic* theories—were sometimes more unbelievable than the actual phenomena themselves.

Given that the sisters would generally sit on either side of the table holding the canvases (not in all accounts), one must be aware of manipulation, as there were curtains, etc. in place, so substitution of pre-prepared canvas is of course possible. But, as with psychic photography, the known possible methods of trickery do little to rule out what is unquestionably actually produced on the precipitated canvas—a perfect recognisable image of the deceased person—but *not* always a direct copy of any known image. That is to say, the mediums could have had no foreknowledge of the image produced on the canvas; it should also be considered that in those days there was no colour photography, yet some reports state the accuracy of the correct colour of eyes, hair, etc. which were produced on the paintings! Perhaps a very different perspective of a well-known person of the day.



THE BANGS SISTERS
Lily Dale – Southwestern New York State

Below gives a general description of the way the sisters worked, taken from the Arthur Findlay College Newsletter of October 15th, 2010:

THE MEDIUMSHIP OF THE BANG'S SISTERS

The following is a description extracted from Admiral W Unsworth Moore's book 'Glimpses of the Next State' published by Watts & Co, London in 1911, as to how the paintings were obtained in his presence through the mediumship of the Bangs Sisters of Chicago.

Two thin canvasses stretched on wooden frames and covered with thin paper were placed face to face and held up in the window. The blind was drawn to the top of the canvasses and curtains hung up in my presence on either side. The window has a southern aspect, and the light coming in through the two semi-transparent canvasses is sufficient for the purposes of taking notes and seeing everything that goes on. The small oak table was lengthways in the window; the bottom of the canvasses rests upon it.

May Bangs sat on my right side facing me and pinching together with her right hand one side of the canvasses. Lizzie Bangs sat on my left side facing me and pinching together the other side of the canvasses with her left hand. I faced the middle of the canvasses, my nose being between two feet and two feet six inches from them. After a few minutes the canvas assumed various hues, rosy, blue and brown; it would become dark and light independently of the sun being clouded or not.

On the morning of the 20th January 1909 went to the Bang Sisters for a profile portrait of Iola as arranged on the 18th. Everything was ready at 10.50 and we sat until 11.30. I had in my pocket a *carte-de-visite* of Iola taken in the year 1874. The mediums had never seen this or any other photograph in my possession. Fifteen minutes after we sat in the window the face and bust appeared; the profile was looking to the right, precisely the same aspect as it has now, framed, hanging in my room. Remember, I was looking through the back of the picture, and it was forming on the further side of that one of the two canvasses nearer to me; consequently, had it gone on as it was and been finished, it would now (when framed) be profile left.



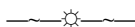
When the portrait was nearly finished the two canvasses were lowered towards me on to the table (the mediums being impressed, apparently to do this). A telegraphic came by taps to May Bangs, who said: "She wants this picture for your wife specially, as well as for you. She thinks that your wife would prefer to see her in the pose to which she is accustomed." Up went the canvasses again to the window, and I found that the whole picture was changed round, so that the profile looked to the left instead of the right. In a few minutes the portrait was completed, May Bangs remarking: "She says she cannot put in the hand."

From the time the face and bust first appeared to the time the canvasses were separated and the finished picture put on the sofa in the next room, twenty-five minutes had elapsed. Neither of the psychics had ever seen the *carte-de-visite* in my pocket. How did they know normally that there ought to be any hand in the picture? As a matter of

fact, in this photo there is a hand (the left) supporting the cheek on its left side? This was omitted in the coloured picture.

When the portrait was finished, it bore a very close resemblance to the photograph. It was looking in the same direction – to the right. As to likeness, it is impossible for anyone who compares the photograph with the picture to deny that they are one and the same individual. At the same time the picture is by no means a slavish copy of the photograph.

Its pose is more upright, the face spirituelle, and the dress not exactly the same. There is a firmness, a decision, and an appearance of calm and contented happiness in the face which is absent from the *carte-de-visite*.



Admiral W. Unsworth Moore further adds, on January 22nd, 1909: Sat with the Bangs Sisters for a portrait of Cleopatra:

As before two canvasses were produced, covered with blank drawing paper, laid face to face, and held up against the window, the bottom of the canvasses, in this case, resting on the sill of the window, as they were much larger in size than those used for the two portraits of Iola.¹²



I sat between the psychics, as on previous occasions, my eyes looking straight into the centre of the canvasses from a distance of two feet to two feet six inches. We took our places at 10.55. About 11.05 the form began to appear, and it was roughly finished in ten minutes. We were then directed, by taps on a slate, to put the canvasses on the table and sit around it. We moved the table to the centre of the room, placed the canvasses flat upon it, covered them over with the felt tablecloth, and sat around as directed. At 11.30 we were informed that the picture could be raised; the canvasses were now separated and the picture put on a sofa in a neighbouring drawing-room.

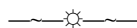
In all precipitations through the mediumship of the Bangs Sisters the picture is found to be on the further side of the canvas which is next to the sitter. The stuff of which the picture is composed is damp, and rubs off at the slightest touch, like soot. Notwithstanding this, the paper on the canvas furthest from the sitter is unsoiled. The picture, while in process, can be seen clearly through the back of the canvas; but of course it presents the reverse aspect to that when it is framed – left arm for the right, and so forth.

The portrait of Cleopatra is practically the same now as it was when it was lifted from the table. Afterwards, but not while I was looking at it, the colours deepened a little, flowers were added to the embroidery of the dress, a ring was put on the finger of the left hand, and the picture acquired a general appearance of greater richness and finish. It was

¹² “The two portraits of Iola”? It is unclear whether or not this is an error or whether indeed Admiral W. Unsworth Moore received two portraits of Iola!

hanging in the lecture-room of the London Spiritualistic Alliance for four months, and it is therefore unnecessary to describe it.

It cannot be called a work of high art; the dress is stiff, and the anatomical features are deficient; but it is undoubtedly a representation of an Egyptian queen, and, considering the way in which it was done, a fine example of spirit power.



It is clear that Vice-Admiral W. Usborne Moore was a strong supporter of sisters Lizzie and May Bangs, but he would come into contact with researchers and magicians who would not be as sympathetic to the genuineness of the sisters. One such opponent was the psychical researcher, Hereward Carrington, in connection with the Bangs Sisters' slate-writing. Carrington went to Chicago in 1909 and reported in the *Annals of Psychic Science* (July-September 1910) that he had found fraud. He had addressed a letter in a sealed envelope to "Dearest mother, Jane Thompson" (who never existed) and received a reply addressed to "Dearly loved son Harold", signed by his "devoted mother, Jane Thompson".

As the controversy increased, Carrington sent a letter to "Light", published on May 13th, 1911. Carrington pointed out in his letter that fellow-magician David Phelps Abbott, who had invented some famous illusions, had succeeded in duplicating the Bangs Sisters' precipitated paintings—by trickery. Part of Hereward Carrington's letter to "Light" is quoted below; it was in response to an ongoing argument with Vice-Admiral W. Usborne Moore:

The Bangs Sisters and Fraud.

"I could go through Admiral Moore's reports if I chose to do so, and point out exactly where, in my opinion, the fraud crept in, in his slate-writing sittings, but it is hardly necessary. I do not consider them genuine, and Admiral Moore does; others besides myself have detected fraud; Admiral Moore did not—let the matter rest there. If the Bangs Sisters would ever consent to give sittings under really test conditions, I should be most happy, and stand willing to investigate them with the utmost care and patience and to publish a favourable report, should I fail to detect fraud—as I did not hesitate to do in the case of Eusapia.¹³ I have no grudge against the Bangs Sisters; indeed their work interests me immensely."

"Finally, I wish to say this: If this portrait phenomenon can, under virtually the same conditions, be duplicated by fraud, then, surely, its evidential value vanishes. If it could be shown that phenomena, precisely similar to Eusapia's, could be produced by trickery, hitherto unsuspected, then I should give up my belief in her at once. I still believe in her powers because no such proof has been forthcoming. But in the case of the Bangs Sisters, it is a little different.

"For years these 'spirit portraits' were the wonder and the envy of all the conjurers and mediums in America. Attempts were made to duplicate their work, without success. I myself was 'on the fence' regarding their portraits, and so stated in my report. After I had my sittings, Mr. David P. Abbott and myself worked together over this problem, but I was forced to stop, at the time, owing to press of other matters, and Mr. Abbott continued his experiments alone. I think I am safe in saying that he has now succeeded in duplicating the Bangs Sisters' portraits exactly—and by trickery. No chemicals are used, no solar-photography, no spraying—nothing of the kind.

"Two canvases are selected, marked and placed upon a light easel, which is examined. A bright are-lamp is placed behind the canvases. Investigators may walk round the

¹³ Pioneer, Vol. 6, No. 6: "Eusapia Palladino – Hereward Carrington".

canvas during the entire process. They may look above, below, behind, on all sides. A picture slowly forms on the inside—between the two canvases—which picture has the same finish and texture as the Bangs' portraits. It can be made to appear slowly, the eyes to open at will, &c., exactly as their pictures do. The process is, in fact, from all external indications, identical in appearance. In view of this fact, I think the authenticity of the Bangs' 'spirit-portraits' may seriously be called into question! As to their slate-writing, I am certain I could duplicate it myself, under the same conditions.—Yours, &c.,

Hereward Carrington.”

At the time Carrington wrote this letter, David Abbott had not yet released his report of duplicating the Bangs' style of precipitated paintings; Abbott, as far as I know, never sat or attended a public demonstration with the sisters. C.F. Eldredge, a supporter of the sisters, wrote a book stating that it was written by his dead wife through the Bangs Sisters' mediumship. Unfortunately, at present I have been unable to find this book, no doubt valuable, as it is *full of these pictures!* The book title is “Through the Valley of the Shadow and Beyond”.

Abbott (image shown) gives via Eldredge's report a description on how Lizzie and May Bangs conducted their séance:

Mr. Eldredge is a very intelligent man, and is teaching the mysteries of the human mind, how to effect certain marvelous cures, and how to perform other mental miracles—if I may be allowed the word. It was through a description furnished by him that I was able finally to work out the solution of this mystery, and to settle definitely the extravagant claims of the mediums, besides making the stage illusion possible. Mr. Eldredge had the privilege of witnessing one of the Kansas City seances, and I here give his report:



Having met by appointment at the residence of the mediums, my doctor friend and myself were ushered into the studio where the sitting took place. The object was to secure a portrait in colors of the doctor's sister who was killed some six years ago in a run-away accident.

The doctor was requested by the mediums to select two canvases from a dozen or more that were leaning against the wall. This he did from near the middle of the pile, holding them up to the light and rubbing his hand over them in order to determine if there was any coating or film over them. I also examined them very carefully, and was satisfied there was not. One of the mediums now took the two framed canvases and placing them face to face, stood them upon a small table in front of a window which looked out upon the Paseo, one of the great boulevards of our city. The canvases were leaned against the window which faced the south.

One of the mediums stood upon a chair and pulled down the blind to the top of the canvases, and then each of them drew a soft, dark curtain from the side of the window to the frames, thus darkening all of the window except where light came through the canvases.

The light from the window passed directly through the canvases and they appeared clear and white. My friend held a picture of his dead sister in his hand, being requested to fix the expression of her face in his mind. We were seated immediately in front of the window, not more than three feet from the canvases while the mediums stood at the two sides of the table holding them and talking to us.

After waiting possibly five minutes, one of the mediums said, 'You will observe how the canvases are drawing. They are being sized.' The front canvas did seem to be stretching on the frame making a slight noise, as if the thumb were being drawn upon the side of the frame. Presently the noise stopped, and there appeared on the outer edge of the canvases, or rather between the two, a slight shadow. I did not notice it until our attention was called to it by the mediums. It continued to darken while the center remained white and clear. In a few minutes I noticed a pale pink, almost directly in the center. It seemed like the glow of sunrise, but there was no form. Next we noticed an outline. The face was forming. We noticed two dark blurs that grew more distinct, and we saw that they were eyebrows and eyelashes of closed eyes. The lines of the mouth appeared, and the outlines of the head became visible, while the shoulders were distinct; and then the eyes opened out, giving a life-like effect to the portrait.

Was I dreaming? I felt like pinching myself to see. A woman's face was looking at us from between the canvases, beautiful in form and feature.

My friend had been told to suggest any changes he wanted during the formation of the picture. He now said that he would like the face turned a little more to the right giving more of a front view. Almost immediately the picture began to fade from the canvas, and it grew fainter until it lost every detail. The outlines of the head became indistinct. The eyes went out into mere dark rings. Presently we saw the face coming as before. The face seemed turned a little this time, though I am not positive that it was. I imagined that it was, and the doctor seemed better satisfied; however, the change was very slight if any. We were so carried away with the marvel of the performance, that reason gave place to sentiment. The very marvel was inspiring. This time the development was more rapid. The eyes opened again as before.

The doctor now asked that the eyes be made a little darker blue, more of a gray; and while he was speaking I noticed that the eyes were changing to a blue gray, or else my imagination was playing me false. He now suggested a slight change of the nose, which was made, and the lines of the mouth were altered at his suggestion. He now suggested that the face was a little too full, and it seemed to narrow slightly. The picture seemed to follow the doctor's thought. He was asked if he would have, as a hair ornament a crescent, a star or crown. The doctor suggested a crescent, and immediately a crescent of gold with gems of white appeared. Up to this time the shoulders seemed bare. He was asked to choose whether there should be a high or low collar. He suggested one of medium height and it at once appeared. On looking at the photograph, the doctor now saw a string of beads around the neck. Without speaking, the beads came into view about the neck, one bead at a time.

They changed in color from white to amber then to gold. He seemed to conjure the picture. As a dream follows the will, so this picture followed the doctor's thought. Meanwhile the background had changed in color several times, from white to light yellow, then to dark yellow or brown, and then to green with a tinge of red, after which it mottled beautifully until the effect was superb. The changes took place like waves of light passing upwards over the whole picture. The two canvases were now laid flat on the table, and a third canvas was then lifted from the floor and placed over them for a cover. We were then asked to place our hands on this, so as to 'set the colors.' Soon the portrait was uncovered, and I found the paint was a kind of greasy substance, as I rubbed some of it on my fingers.

My friend had enclosed a photograph of his sister, together with a letter to her spirit, between slates for a time, in the presence of these mediums, some three days before this sitting. It was then his appointment was made.

I have heard of the Hindu magician who plants a seed and grows a tree before your eyes, and of the turning of water into wine, but here was a phenomenon even greater; one that seemed to contradict every known law of nature; and now as I record this the day after, I am more bewildered than when I saw the work done. I do not believe the picture was painted before our eyes, for that is beyond rational belief, and by no process of reasoning can such an idea satisfy my mind. Where did the colors come from? How did they get between the close fitting canvases, and by what miraculous power were they intelligently spread over one of them?

We compared the portrait with the photograph; the psychics asked to see it, claiming never to have seen it before. The likeness was perfect. Any one could recognize it. There seemed to have been no opportunity for trickery or fraud, and everything was open and above-board. We could see all over the room at all times, under the table in front of us, and everywhere. Yet the work was contrary to natural law and all human experience.

One of these mediums said to me when speaking of their marvel, ‘We are the only people in the world to-day, who positively and absolutely prove immortality.’

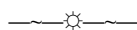
I expect to work out this problem somehow, somewhere, sometime. But there is no hurry. It will be the result of patient effort.

Another lady here had quite a large portrait made. It came in about five minutes. She said it seemed like a rain-storm on the canvas, the colors seemingly being pelted on in waves.

I also have a report from Thomas Grinshaw, the spiritualist lecturer, and President of the Missouri State Association of Spiritualists. He saw a portrait produced on a stage in the auditorium at Camp Chesterfield. An attempt was made to produce a portrait in the afternoon, but it resulted in an accident and nearly caused a fire. The attempt was repeated in the evening with more success. Clean canvases were selected by a committee and faced together, and placed in front of an ordinary wooden soap-box.

The box was first placed on a little table near the front of the stage. It had neither front nor back, and an ordinary kerosene lamp was placed in the box to shine through the canvases. A black cloth was then hung over the rear of the box so as to darken the room, and cut off all light except what passed through the canvases. A medium stood at each side of the box holding them. The portrait gradually materialized, then dematerialized, after which it again reappeared. He was particularly impressed by the making of the lace work around the neck. A large audience witnessed this production, and a large committee was on the stage and helped to select the clean canvases.

This is a very brief summary of his report. It will be seen that all of the main features are about the same as described by Mr. Eldredge.



The above full quote is used, as it gives the reader a good understanding of the full procedure the sisters used on this occasion. Abbott struggled with the report furnished by Eldredge; “The more I thought, the greater the mystery became,” he noted; after various experiments he succeeded in replicating an illusion which mimicked the process of Lizzie and May Bangs from Eldredge’s narrative. It required a prepared painting, distraction and substitution, given that the blank canvases were examined by the sitter/s and marked; however, due to space the full report is too large to publish here in full. However, Abbott published his methods and one

can freely download “The Spirit Portrait Mystery – Its Final Solution”, by David P. Abbott, originally published by “The Open Court”, April 1913.

The interesting part is, of course, the appearance of the materialising image, dematerialising, changes in front of the sitter or audiences. This is what the magician says after the finished portrait was at the back of the first canvas due to professional substitution, etc.:

“So the psychics, acting simultaneously, pin the soft black curtains at the side of the window to the front frame, and at the same time allow the back canvas to tilt back out of focus. The top curtain, still being very high, lets so much light into the room, that it helps to obscure what comes through the canvases, when the two are separated but an inch. But before the top curtain is drawn, completely darkening the room, the portrait must be moved or tilted further back. It must be remembered that the bottoms of the canvases stand on a table end directly in front of a window, with a psychic at each side holding the canvases and discoursing and gesticulating, so as to take and direct the attention where desired.”

“The sitter naturally thinks that his two chosen blanks are now in the window, and he seems to be seeing right through them and they appear clear and white. He does not dream that his portrait, all finished, is already in the window behind the front canvas, but merely moved back out of focus.”

“Next, everything being in readiness, the psychics have but to manipulate the rear canvas very slowly to get the effects. Meanwhile they skilfully employ suggestion announcing in advance each effect as it is to appear. The eyes seem to be dark blurs until the tops of the canvases are crowded together very closely, whereupon they appear to open. That is, the dark blurs dissolve into open eyes, giving them the appearance of opening out. This is particularly apparent when the eyes are colored a beautiful sky-blue. The use of suggestion before this effect, by the psychics announcing that “the eyes will now open,” impresses this effect upon the sitter’s mind.



“By crowding together the top of the canvases first, the eyes open when the shoulders are still indistinct enough to appear indefinite or bare—that is, mere dark outlines. As the majority of the effects appear the last quarter of an inch, and nearly all of them in the last half-inch, if it be remembered that four or five minutes are used in this amount of motion, one can realize how very slowly the rear canvas must approach the front one. Also the use of so much time greatly adds to the effect when a miracle is supposed to be in

the act of performance. The psychics seem to be trying so hard to hurry it up, and the stress of desire is so great, that the slowness of production produces the effect on the sitter’s mind of great effort on the part of the spirits.¹⁴

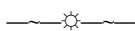
¹⁴ The drawing is taken from a 1905 newspaper ad: “The Bangs Sisters”.

“After the eyes open, if one psychic crowds up the bottom of the canvas on her side, the lace work will begin to form on her side and the beads, etc., to appear. Then if the other psychic slowly crowds up the bottom on her side, this causes the lace work to finish and the beads to come one at a time. There is also an apparent change of color as each object takes on clear-cut detail. Naturally during this movement the background is working in most beautifully like waves of light, etc. The changes of color are, however, to a certain extent imagination; and this occurs easily among so many confusing details all coming at the same time. The hair ornament can be made to appear by skilfully pulling off a patch on the back of the portrait which has been stuck on with wax and with a thread attached, but I hardly think this necessary.¹⁵

“The choice is undoubtedly “forced” by suggestion; and if this occurs early in the performance, before the ornament appears, the psychics can announce its appearance when the right time arrives and thus produce that effect. For instance, one psychic would say to the other, “She ought to have a hair ornament. I think a crescent would be beautiful, don’t you? Or would a star, or crown, be better?” The other would say, “Oh, it should be a crescent by all means; for I think a crown or star would be out of place and not at all artistic. Which do you think would be best, Mr.?” Naturally he would choose a crescent, and would afterwards think he had free choice. Should he choose a crown or a star, it would only be necessary to explain to him that a crescent is much more artistic, and he would be sure to yield to “superior persons who wield supernatural powers.”¹⁶

“The effects of narrowing the visage, or of slightly turning it, or of altering the lines of the nose or mouth slightly, can be apparently effected by a slight jostling of the rear canvas and the use of suggestion at the time. Thus, if the sitter request the visage to narrow, the psychic can say “all right,” and at that instant cause the portrait behind to move sidewise the slightest amount. The sitter will see the portrait move, and construe it to be a slight narrowing, for the vision being at the time concentrated on the point in question, will see only its movement. The same will apply to the lines of the nose or mouth, Also, at any time, a slightly tighter crowding of the canvases so as to make any feature come out brighter and clearer, coupled with suggestion, will carry the effect of an alteration of the portrait in response to the sitter’s request.

“All of this is the real art of the performance, and what makes it “strong.” It is not what you do, but how you do it. The strong way this has been dressed up and presented to believers, is the secret of the marvel and has made it what it is. The principle alone was not so much, but embellished with this incomparable art of presentation, it has been one of the wonders of the world.”



Abbott’s illusion was widely performed by various magicians in England and France, as well as by a great American magician, Howard Thurston, under direct authority from David Abbott.

¹⁵ Mr Eldredge in this statement may have helped Abbott: “The front canvas did seem to be stretching on the frame making a slight noise, as if the thumb were being drawn upon the side of the frame. Presently the noise stopped, and there appeared on the outer edge of the canvases, or rather between the two, a slight shadow. I did not notice it until our attention was called to it by the mediums.”

¹⁶ As far as information for an illusion goes, i.e., suggestion - it is demonstrated in various articles, for example by Admiral W. Unsworth Moore: “She [the spirit] wants this picture for your wife specially, as well as for you. She thinks that your wife would prefer to see her in the pose to which she is accustomed.”

Editor's Note:

Elizabeth (Lizzie) and Mary (May) Bangs came from a family of mediums. They had two brothers, and their parents were Edward and Meroe. Their mother was a practising medium and when Lizzie and May were young girls the family entertained paying guests at their home demonstrating their mediumship. The editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, Steven Jones, published on August 3rd, 1872 “An Evening with the Bangs Children”. It is difficult to state the exact ages of the girls but each was a young child/teenager at the time. The report suggests that the sisters were well-accomplished physical mediums at such a young age, moving pianos, etc.: a few quoted examples:

“When we took our seat at the table, with two young girls, and one little boy, we were much amused at the readiness with which the spirits used the pencil. It is true the messages would only contain a single sentence or a single word, but they were expressive, and that’s enough. The little girl placed the slate under the table—the pencil is heard to move—then tick, tick, tick, announced the close of the message. The slate is removed, and on it in a plain, bold hand, we find the name Martha. ...”

“Cabinet Séance

was especially interesting. One little boy and one bright-eyed girl were securely tied with ropes, rendering it impossible for them to extricate themselves without assistance. Large hands were exhibited at the aperture of the cabinet, and one was extended far enough to thrum the guitar strings. This was startling—especially so. And then a partially-developed face appeared at the aperture, and we heard the name, “Bennie,” distinctly lisped. It must be remembered that these mediums are young children. There is not a particle of deception in their nature. Their hearts are free from guile, and in all their actions they exhibit the innocence of their nature. No one would accuse them of deception. ...”

Numerous exceptional claims were made in the article. It was under similar circumstances, years later in 1888, that they were raided and charged with fraud during a materialisation séance, as shown in this article. *Pioneer*, whenever possible, shows both sides of the articles researched, so that readers have an informed foundation on which to base their conclusions. Often writers produce only the positive results, leaving out the charges of fraud; these charges should not be disregarded, as they are part of the medium’s history. It was the actual facts which surrounded these allegations where a richer analysis is formed. As found in the recent *Pioneer* three-part series, “A Question of Fraud!”, although mediums are seized and without question in an act of apparent fraud, sometimes the accusations show a lack of total understanding of the process of mediumistic development, misrepresentation and a lack of awareness of the psychological psychic facts surrounding the phenomena and those involved; physical mediumship is a delicate balance of many factors involved. “A Question of Fraud!”¹⁷

It would appear that once Lizzie and May starting their precipitated paintings in the autumn of 1894 they met with great success. Their opposition did not stop their popularity over a long, successful career in precipitated paintings, etc.; magician David Abbotts duplicating the sisters’ work successfully with on-stage acts did not demonstrate fraud. Duplicating a physical phenomenon is not to say that it is fraudulent: to move, for example, a pen in a séance room is an act of having the means to move the pen—we in the body have hands—whereas the spirit uses psychic force or ectoplasm.

Without doubt David Abbott could physically reproduce the Bangs Sisters’ mediumship by illusion but only under rehearsed procedure. But the sisters’ procedure varied in different reports, sometimes in public demonstrations with only one canvas, not on every occasion; a

¹⁷ This starts in *Pioneer*, Vol. 7, No. 3.

photograph was placed between magnetised slates, as was the case with Mr. Eldredge. It was *his* report which was used as a template for Abbott to form the trick. Nor does Abbott explain how in numerous reports mental suggestions alone influenced the materialising images. His simple principle was only moving the rear canvas which contains a finished prepared portrait to give the illusion of seeing the opening and closing of eyes, etc.; in no way does he explain that sometimes the sisters did not touch the canvas.

Abbott and his fellow magicians were one hundred percent reliant on a photograph of the deceased person well before their shows in order to get it painted in a similar fashion. One important issue is—how good were the magicians’ prepared paintings?

Eldredge noted:

I found the paint was a kind of greasy substance, as I rubbed some of it on my fingers.

Admiral W. Unsworth Moore noted:

The stuff of which the picture is composed is damp, and rubs off at the slightest touch, like soot.

Ron Nagy in his book, “Precipitated Spirit Painting”, second edition, 2012, variously notes in his book the medium used to produce the paintings, for example on page 82:

The portraits have been examined by art experts who cannot explain the medium used, as the paintings are not pastels, charcoal, oils, watercolors, or any other known substance. The medium has been compared to the dust on a butterfly’s wings.

I do not know who coined the phrase “dust on a butter-fly’s wings,” but I do know the art experts who originally examined the precipitated spirit painting of Lincoln were from the Eastman Kodak company of Rochester, New York.¹⁸

Eldredge also noted:

My friend had enclosed a photograph of his sister, together with a letter to her spirit, between slates for a time, in the presence of these mediums, some three days before this sitting. It was then his appointment was made.

But did the sisters on *every* occasion ask for a photograph days in advance? Not all accounts suggest this; in Admiral W. Unsworth Moore’s account he states:

I had in my pocket a *carte-de-visite* of Iola taken in the year 1874. The mediums had never seen this or any other photograph in my possession.

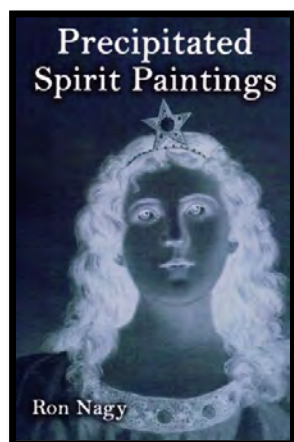
Abbott assumes that the Bangs Sisters *had* access to an image for their portrait in every instance or no spirit-precipitated painting; this is what he said:

Of course it is unnecessary to explain how the photograph can be extracted from slates, or from pockets of coats which were left out in the hall, etc., so as to enable the mediums to get a “snap shot” of it. Any one reading the many slate tricks in my book will not need further enlightenment on this point. Where a portrait conforms to a photograph, an interval of a day or so is taken after the first sitting, before the psychics will give the portrait sitting. If forced to try for a portrait at once no results will be obtained, and it will have to be tried again later. This gives them time to make the portrait.

¹⁸ Ron is talking generally about the Lily Dale precipitated painting by the Bangs and the Campbell Brothers – the spirit painting of Lincoln was by the Campbell Brothers.

If, indeed, the Bangs extracted an image a day or two before the appointment, given that the painting were on large canvases, one may wonder how such works of art were produced in such a short period; were Abbott's of similar quality and similarly presented, perhaps damp, greasy and soot-like?

Ron Nagy in his book notes:



Identifying a Precipitated Spirit Painting

WHEN TRYING to identify precipitated spirit painting, first look at the eyes. In a genuine spirit painting, there are no eyelashes and the eyes are penetrating and look alive. You will definitely receive a different feeling from the precipitated painting, as if the entity was actually compressed into the canvas. Check for brush strokes or sketch lines that are the human artist's telltale pre-painting routine.

Some marks may appear to be brush strokes, but this is not always the case. When the hair materializes on canvas, how else would Spirit form the hair but as a grouping of fine lines? The hair would only appear as a blurred blending of colors.

If the Bangs Sisters produced their own images, what a talent and to produce so quickly! The sisters did many summer seasons at Lily Dale with around three sittings a day. To conclude, there is an interesting observation in Ron Nagy's book: he notes:

In all cases portraits appeared without eyelashes.

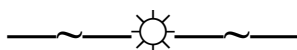
As previously noted in this article, it is interesting to note what Mr Eldredge stated:

The face was forming. We noticed two dark blurs that grew more distinct, and we saw that they were eyebrows and eyelashes of closed eyes.

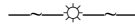
Whether or not the eyelashes appeared on the finished painting, we do not know; perhaps some of the lesser-known private paintings of the time—these most probably have not survived or are in an old dusty attic somewhere—or possibly some unknown painting may have had eyelashes, as it is not known whether or not their style of painting may have possibly changed over the years.

This article has but touched the surface of the mediumship of Elizabeth and Mary Bangs. Other than Ron Nagy's book mentioned, another book has been published on the Bangs Sisters: "Portraits from Beyond: The Mediumship of the Bangs Sisters", by N. Riley Heagerty. I must be honest, I have not as yet read this book but it is reviewed by the Society for Psychical Research by Tom Ruffles, available online.

The photographs shown in this article are a poor representative for the stunning originals



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