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

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Special thanks to Leslie Price and Charles Coulston for their work in sub-editing this issue

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Why did the S.N.U. remove Helen Duncan's diploma in 1945?

Special Introduction:

The Union is sometimes asked why (70 years ago this year) it withdrew its certificate as a physical medium from Helen Duncan shortly after her release from prison. Officers of the Union had assisted Mrs Duncan in her trial and the Freedom Fund provided considerable financial help.

After her release, experienced sitters with Mrs Duncan reported that she had resumed frequent sittings and that the quality of her mediumship showed a marked decline. Attempts to help her establish a safer mode of work were rejected by her. The Union became concerned that in the event of a further arrest and trial the good name of Spiritualism would be damaged. Any medium who holds a certificate from the Union is in effect sponsored by the Union.

Recently the Executive Committee has re-examined the surviving documentation. It has given permission to Paul Gaunt, the curator of the Britten Memorial Museum and editor of the Union's own historical journal, 'The Pioneer', to publish this, so that Union members and the public can have the facts before them. We welcome any further information.

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Although at the time the Union published an official statement in the 'Two Worlds', seven decades on the reasons for the Union withdrawing the diploma that Helen Duncan had held from circa 1931 are shrouded in mystery. The various biographies and websites give no information on the actual events which resulted in the removal of her diploma.

On Friday September 22nd 1944, Helen Duncan, after serving 172 days of her nine-month sentence, was released from HM Prison Holloway. As published in the 'Two Worlds' for October 20th 1944, Helen wrote from the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh:

I am likely to be here for some time as my heart is affected . . . .My Spiritualism is my life, and for all the laws of the country I could not and will not give it up. I will not sit again under the same conditions, but intend to keep my mediumship active.

There are numerous reports that Helen had broken away from the SNU shortly after her release from prison; this claim appears not to be strictly true. Helen was a friend of Percy

Wilson[1] and his family, who gave support to Helen at her 1944 trial. Dorothy Wilson was the Secretary of the Exponents and Education Committee[2] and her husband Percy was a National Councillor of the Union and also (I believe) the Chairman of the Exponents and Education Committee.

In September 1944 the National Council appointed Miss May Price as General Secretary of the Union, taking over from Ernest Allan Keeling in October. The Union had inaugurated a 'National Register' of Exponents and Mediums, using the 1944 Diploma list as a basis.[3] Miss Price sent out the documentation in December 1944 and as part of the Union's campaign for religious freedom Helen was asked to sign the declaration and return it with her Class B subscription for 1945.

Dorothy Wilson wrote to Helen on February 1st 1945, as the General Secretary had had no reply and the signed declaration, etc. were required by February 10th. A few days later Helen's reply was received, thanking Dorothy for her nice letter and giving her regards to Percy and the boys. Helen stated: "I did not think it worth my while signing it as I am not working. I am not in a position meantime to renew my membership fee. I did think the S.N.U. would have made me a member free meantime." She returned the signed (V. H. Duncan) declaration dated February 4th 1945.

Dorothy Wilson replied on February 7th thanking her for the declaration and commenting: "I thought you were not working at present but did not know if you intended to take up work again. With regard to your membership fee, I am afraid that the Union could not pay, but my husband and I will gladly pay it for you this year. I think you are wise to take a long rest from seance work. I hope you will soon get back to health and strength…" Wilson notes: "subs 5/- sent to office".

The following month SNU Minister and founder editor of 'Psychic News', Maurice Barbanell, received news that Helen was again working. Below is taken from 'Psychic News', March 31st 1945 – "All Worlds Are One" feature: -[4]

> **Warning To Helen Duncan**
>
> Once again it falls to my lot to issue a public warning to Helen Duncan. If she had paid attention to my previous warnings, I doubt whether she would have been prosecuted.

[1] SNU President 1950-1953.

[2] Today we have the Dorothy Wilson Prize: this is for the highest marks over a completed range of subjects required for the award of a Diploma as a Speaker, Demonstrator or Administrator.

[3] 1943: A New Scheme by the Exponents' Committee for a National Register approved by the National Council. Percy Wilson exhibited this to the Conference at the following AGM at Leicester (July 1944), with a printed copy of the Exponent's Certificate, which had been approved by the Exponents' Committee. During this year "Applications from platform workers for inclusion in the National Register have been coming in steadily. During 1944 365 Certificates were granted, bringing the total on the Register, including Diploma Holders, up to 514. There were no educational examinations held during 1944," as the whole Educational Course was in the process of being revised.

[4] Kindly supplied courtesy of Psychic News, Suite 6, Thremhall Park, Start Hill, Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire CM22 7WE.

Soon after her release from prison, she was approached by the Spiritualists' National Union, whose freedom fund paid the entire cost of her defence, with the suggestion that the Union should take charge of her seances. Mrs. Duncan refused to agree.

She has been giving "materialisation" seances in Lancashire, and the results, as they are described to me, are very poor. Whatever they are, they are not materialisations. That does not surprise me in view of the ordeal through which she has passed. The reports are sent me by sympathetic Spiritualists who attended her seances in the old days.

Heading For Trouble

I warn Helen Duncan that she is asking for trouble. To travel the country, giving seances without competent supervision by the S.N.U. or some similar body, will land her again in jail. This time the sentence is likely to be not nine months, but five years. In any case, she ought to wait till her powers return.

At least as a gesture to the S.N.U., which has done so much on her behalf, Mrs. Duncan ought to place herself under their auspices.

Besides, she is placing the S.N.U. in a great dilemma. She holds their diploma as a physical medium and therefore they are sponsoring her seances.

Maurice Barbanell informed the Spiritualists' National Union of concerns surrounding Helen's mediumship, giving contact details of a séance held in the Wigan area. On March 31st Dorothy Wilson wrote to the complainant regarding a séance held on March 5th. Asking for full details and a statement confirming the report if possible from some other person, Mrs Wilson stated: "It is highly important particularly at present, that everything should be done that is possible to safeguard the movement generally."

On April 2nd Dorothy Wilson received a copy of the report of the séance in question and the next day she received another report of the séance signed by the complainant, with signatures and addresses from four of the sitters at the March 5th séance. Although the report is seventy years old the personal details of all parties are not here published.

Below is the full report printed for the first time. The complainant sent what he called the 'First report', signed by four of the sitters, and in a 'Further report' he gives more information about the séance and his own personal views. The First report is inserted into the Further report as instructed by the writer.

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Report of a seance held in Lancashire on 5th March, 1945. With Mrs. Helen Duncan as the Medium

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The subject-matter of a tentative report forwarded to the Editor of "Psychic News" on 21st March, 1945, having received mention in the columns of that paper and resulted in a request for further details for consideration by the Exponents Committee and the Council of the Spiritualists' National Union, the following facts, comments and theories are to be read in conjunction with that report as the personal observations and statements of the undersigned, and are not to be embodied above any other signature which may be appended to the First Report, unless application is made to such other signatories for confirmation.

Experience of Spiritualism.--I have been interested in Spiritualism for more than 20 years, and in addition to clairvoyance, clairaudience and Psychometry, have had the experience of seeing levitation, Transfiguration, cold lights, slate writing, trance and other kinds of control, pictures in the crystal (whether or not this can be considered as part of Spiritualistic phenomena), hearing voices from the trumpet and direct voice, trance and inspirational addresses, and exponents of Spiritualist philosophy. In addition I have seen materialisation with Mrs. Helen Duncan dating from pre-war days and one other medium for materialisation.

I have read much Spiritualist literature, and received messages of great importance from mediums as well as a lot of messages which have never come true. At the risk of unpopularity I have always insisted upon the recipients of messages and the witnesses of phenomena keeping to the actual facts of their experience.

Events before the seance now under consideration.--The party for the seance on March 5th consisted of 14 women and three men, and apart from the householder, I was the only male present who had witnessed materialisation, though several of the ladies had attended such seances. On one occasion I saw as many as three figures walking and talking to members of the audience at a seance in Lancashire, but Mrs. Duncan was not the medium that day. However, I have seen figures materialised and walking about when Mrs. Duncan was seated in her chair, there being no doubt that the figures were entirely separate from Mrs. Duncan. I know Mrs. Duncan personally, having had long conversations with her and there is no possibility of mistaken identity in this case.

Lunch was taken at an hotel situated some half mile from the meeting place. All were in good humour, for the journey had been pleasant, the day was fine though not too warm, and the lunch was quite enjoyable. One or two of the party had a small whisky with tea or coffee, but the majority had nothing intoxicating, and approximately three hours elapsed between the end of lunch and the commencement of the seance. I must leave it to others to comment on the possibility of this liquor having a detrimental effect upon the proceedings which were to follow.

The medium was not on hand when the meeting place was reached and during the wait of almost two hours many of the party became restless and anxious. Some were fortified with tea but the sigh of relief when the arrival of the medium was announced was indicative of the strain under which most of the party had been labouring.

The medium arrived in a taxi and was unaccompanied. I thought she looked younger and fresher than when I had seen her before. Despite the advisability of a rest being urged upon her, the medium decided to carry on without delay, and the party moved into the séance room, the accommodation proving to be only just sufficient. Although testimony was given as stated in the first report (inserted below) that the cabinet had been examined it was not examined during my presence in the seance room, and as I was one of the first in the room to take my place at the farthest end, there had been opportunity after such examination to carry out any irregularities had such been intended. Mrs. Duncan did not change into seance robes as was her former custom, indeed she said she did not intend to change, but invited a search to be made of the clothes she was then wearing and retained during the séance.

I had an opportunity to look into the cabinet after the seance, and a glance revealed the presence of a cupboard or drawer behind the curtain, and this, along with the perfunctory search of the medium, came in for adverse criticism after the meeting.

The First Report should be read here. - ⇓

The seance was held in a cottage situated in a remote part of Lancashire. The meeting room about 12’ x I5’, contained furniture appropriate to the premises, while the cabinet was formed by dark draw-curtains across one corner. About 20 people were present, some of whom had had experience of materialisation. Lighting was provided by means of an electric torch and a storm lamp, both being dimmed by red material.

In answer to a question by the medium one of the sitters testified that the cabinet had been examined. The medium then left the room to be searched and, on returning, entered the cabinet immediately, sinking down into the chair with her eyes closed, whereupon the curtains were drawn. At once a voice from the cabinet asked for the light to be reduced, and the electric lamp was extinguished. The storm lamp (which was suspended from the ceiling), continued to give illumination sufficient to enable all the sitters and the contents of the room to be seen with ease and in detail.

A voice from behind the curtain described a visitor and, after being invited to come forward, a figure appeared holding the curtains apart. From the farthest end of the room the figure was plainly that of the medium draped in something white, her face, hands and dress being distinguishable.

The announcer from the cabinet spoke in a voice unlike that of the medium, and the figures which appeared had intonations in keeping with their age and sex. The voice of the announcer sounded very tired and dropped to a weary whisper at the end of each sentence. The figures were not announced by name, and the sitters concerned were found by the voice from the cabinet asking for someone near the centre, or someone near the back, and so on, and first one sitter and then another would speak up until the right one was found, signified by: “Yes, that is the voice”.

The only information volunteered from the cabinet was man, woman or child, and the nature of their passing. “Came to our side of life under very tragic circumstances”, “The cause of passing was due directly to child-birth”, “Died from consumption”, “Invite the lady out, please,” “Sing a hymn”. These few sentences, each repeated more than once,

comprised the conversation from the announcer, and every languid utterance trailed off--a low rallentando, with a kind of despair, which persisted even in the closing remark when the announcer "Hoped he had made everyone very happy".

The figures, when they did talk, often failed to address a single remark directly to the sitters who had claimed them, reserving their conversation for those people near to the cabinet, while the voices, dialects, expressions of speech and mannerisms sometimes proved a hindrance rather than an aid to recognition. On more than one occasion when the visitor fai1ed to display any of the characteristics which should have served as identification, a dumfounded sitter would be further embarrassed by the visitant's remark—"Is that all you have to say?"

One of the sitters asked after her own guide--an Indian of exceptional height, and the medium appeared holding her left arm aloft, with the hand turned palm downwards over her head, whilst a quantity of white stuff draped the hand--a representation of the head of a tall man. Unlike the more averaged-sized figures, this head seemed to be featureless, the majority of the faces being well formed and of a good colour - healthy looking in the rosy light, and belonging to figure which was the medium in her black dress (really dark navy Blue), scantily draped in white stuff--often transfigured to fit the part, but still the same.

The announcer had already intimated that the power was failing when someone in the audience asked for the medium's child guide. A figure appeared and made an attempt to sing and give some semblance of gaiety, but it was a failure, and the figure withdrew.

Through the sitting the moving of feet inside the cabinet was to be heard and sometimes distinct footsteps sounded, as the figures approached the curtains or shifted position whilst in full view of all present.

The meeting was very orderly, (*and though it was obvious to both the experienced sitters and those unacquainted with the phenomena what was taking place,) no attempt was made to interrupt the proceedings.

Signed … . … & four of the sitters.

End of First report inserted.

In the last paragraph of the First Report (marked*) the words in brackets should be deleted and read here (*and though it was obvious to both the experienced sitters and those unacquainted with the phenomena what was taking place,) for it was only after the seance was over that it became obvious that all present knew what had been taking place, and I wished to keep the First Report free from all comment.

Being in a private house I, for one, did not wish to create any disturbance, and along with the others paid the fee (12/6), with as good a grace as possible, and the party returned to the hotel for tea.

Behind closed doors tongues became loosened, and opinions about the seance were expressed with great candour. One or two claimed to have seen the irregularities of such a nature that they were reluctant to make unsupported statements. These I must leave for further verification.

Comments and opinions by the sitters.--All who spoke up at the meeting over the teacups were emphatic that every figure was Mrs Duncan draped in white stuff. Those nearest to the cabinet confirming what I had seen from a greater distance. Only one claimed to have received anything evidential and that was in a single remark said to be characteristic of the person who was supposed to have materialised. One gentleman received a long speech upholding Roman Catholicism from his returned 'father', who claimed to be a Roman still, but as the real father was never a Roman Catholic it was not evidential.

Figures claiming to be my wife's mother and an Uncle John of mine followed one another. Neither spoke directly to us, and both would have made us blush with their coarse speech and dialect, for my wife's mother was a gently reserved woman, full of warm love for both of us, while the Uncle John referred to was an author, poet, linguist, historian, of mild speech and ready but kindly wit.

This example proved to be typical of practically all the 'visitors' as the following comments will show.

(1). The whole show was a hoax.

(2). Mrs. Duncan brought the white stuff into the room.

(3). The white stuff was hidden in the drawer or cupboard in the cabinet.

(4). Mrs. Duncan was conscious all the time and faked the trance.

(5). Mrs. Duncan is a ventriloquist.

(6). Mrs. Duncan is a transfiguration medium.

(7). The white stuff was muslin or some such material.
Etc. Etc.

As such remarks as these were passed by sitters who had previously been convinced of the genuineness of Mrs. Duncan's powers as a materialisation medium, the Portsmouth affair takes on another aspect if it was a séance of similar quality.

Each of the above comments presents its own difficulties, and, as I do not accuse the medium of any one of the above suggested 'frauds', I will pass on to my own speculations as to the why and wherefore of the matter, but must first mention further comments made: -

(8). The white stuff was apported material.

(9). Conditions were poor and an attempt was being made to please the sitters.

Personal opinion.--of the above (1) Too crude. (2) Foolish to bring insufficient. (3) As No. 2. (4) No evidence that Mrs. Duncan is so cunning or so clever. (5) No evidence—would do well on the stage. (6) Possible, but useless without other factors already dismissed in (2). (7) Again, why bring an insufficiency. The medium was never fully draped. (8) Why poor show at materialisation when gifted as apport medium? (9) A poor excuse for all the sitters were displeased.

Those in a position to know stated that the medium smelled of whiskey. I do know that this applied on former occasions. I also know that the medium is sometimes draped when genuine phenomena also takes place at the same seance.

My problems are somewhat different. The lighting was greater than I have ever seen before. The voice of Albert, allowing for the tired tone described was, in my opinion, the same tone and manner of expression as formerly. If Albert was in charge why should he allow such a travesty? The attempt at vivacity was very like the former Peggy, as was the voice.

I therefore conclude that Mrs. Duncan was unconscious of the proceedings, and under the influence of a subconscious power with the clairvoyance of the hypnotic state, with ectoplasm present as the automatic result of training by external powers, i.e., Albert and his assistants, the insufficiency of ectoplasm being due to the power required to move the medium physically.

I may be completely wrong, and would appreciate any further suggestions or findings of the Exponents Committee or Council.

(Signed)…. . ….

The complainant added another five points to his report:

(I) The seance lasted somewhat under half an hour.

(2) The sound of footsteps referred to were slippered or booted feet.

(3) During the seance the remark “Don’t do that!” was made inside the cabinet as though one person was remonstrating with another. The voice was not Mrs. Duncan’s normal voice.

(4) About two-thirds way through the seance a request was made from the cabinet for the light to be lowered and a gentleman turned the storm lamp lower, but there remained sufficient light to see clearly all that was taking place. The storm lamp, though covered round the side allowed a considerable amount of white light to escape, throwing a ring of clear light onto the ceiling.

(5) One sitter near the cabinet declared that when a child’s figure was presented the medium was definitely stooping down, her back, in a horizontal position being clearly visible. I did not see his myself.

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On April 13th 1945 a typewritten letter signed by May Price, the General Secretary of the Union, was sent to Helen Duncan outlining the complaints against her:

Dear Mrs Duncan,

The Council of the Union has received reports that you have recently held a number of seances in North Wales and in Lancashire in circumstances which might have brought grave consequences to yourself and to the Spiritualist Movement as a whole.

One report, signed by a number of the sitters who were present, contains details of a seance which you attended unaccompanied at a certain village in Lancashire. It is stated:

(1) that at this seance a number of supposed materialised forms appeared but that the particulars of identity given by these forms and by the voice from the cabinet – ostensibly that of 'Albert' but very tired and dropping to a weary whisper at the end of each sentence – were fictitious and in no wise evidential:

(2) that all these supposed materialised forms were plainly yourself in your dark dress, scantily draped in white stuff; your face and hands and dress being distinguishable from the farthest end of the room;

(3) that throughout the sitting the moving of feet inside the cabinet was heard and sometimes distinct footsteps (as of booted feet) sounded as the figure approached the curtains or shifted position whilst in view;

(4) that some sitters identified the form of a small figure as yourself bending to a horizontal position and partly draped in white.

The council also understand that some of the sitters allege;

(a) that when you arrived at the cottage your breath smelled of whiskey.

(b) that before the seance neither you nor the cabinet was searched in the presence of witnesses;

(c) that the white material was introduced by yourself.

(d) that the whole sitting was a hoax.

Other sitters, whilst not accusing you of conscious fraud or deliberate attempts to deceive, nevertheless regard the seance as entirely, and even dangerously, unsatisfactory and indicative of a very serious deterioration in your mediumship.

The Council has learned of these reports with great regret since the holding of seances of the kind, and in the conditions of these to which the reports relate, cannot but be regarded as "likely to discredit the cause of Spiritualism" (see Regulation 5 enclosed).

In view of the warnings already given to you, privately by the Union's legal advisor after your discharge from Holloway gaol and publicly in the Declaration of the Freedom Committee, the Council has been obliged to consider the question of the continuance of your Diploma. In this connection, it is prepared to take into account any representation

you may wish to make provided these are sent to me within the next 28 days. For the present, however, having regard to the serious position created by your conduct, the Council must ask you to regard your Diploma as being suspended.

Yours sincerely,

p.p SPIRITUALISTS' NATION UNION LTD.,

General Secretary.

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A handwritten reply was received from Mrs Duncan on April 18th 1945 as shown below:

Dear Miss Price,

I have received your letter with the same post I received the enclosed from Wigan.[5] I do think in all fairness to me they might have complained at the time and have given me a chance to defend myself anyway I have not been giving sitting, only there it is the first & last I can assure you. I have come to the conclusion it is kick a dog when it is down. I feel very indignant about the past smelt drink what a dam cheek & I can get those who were in contact with me to prove otherwise. I have never touched any drink in no way since before I was at Portsmouth & I resent it very much. Anyway I am having nothing more to do with the movement so that is final & for Mr. Quastel of Meersbrook he has a very short lived memory he had plenty of me & now he talks about something he knows nothing about.[6]

I am yours faithfully,

V. H. Duncan

P.S.

Oh & by the way who in the S.N.U. offered me any work. I have always worked for S.N.U. churches & for Portsmouth it was a district councillor who took me there first & the one who said I said I would not work for them for £20 is a liar.

Please don't trouble to reply.

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[5] "Wigan, Lancs. Dear Mrs. Duncan, I have read with deep regret the account in the "Psychic News" & I am writing to tell you that the people of Wigan know nothing at all about it. I was dumb founded when Ella came back from Blackpool & told me that they wondered if it was from here, on my oath it was not, for although you have disappointed me so many times & I have been put to a lot of trouble it would be the last thing in my head to do you a dirty trick. We are still expecting you. Sincerely, (signed).. ….."

[6] **Warning To Helen Duncan:** "I AGREE absolutely that if Helen Duncan does not toe the line and stop giving seances until her mediumship is A1 again, and until she agrees to let the S.N.U. "mother" her the S.N.U. should *not* defend her if she gets into trouble again.

"If mediums realise that S.N.U. money will only be spent when *justified* by circumstances, they will work much more wisely.—C. I. Quastel. Sheffield."

Taken from *Psychic News,* 14th April 1945, 'Dear Sir' (letters) feature. Kindly supplied courtesy of *Psychic News*.

Around this time Maurice Barbanell furnished the Union with some more reports, which showed that at around the time of the above-reported séance Duncan had conducted at least six others, some in North Wales, some at Blackpool, and others in the Wyre district of Lancashire. Barbanell was informed on April 22nd 1945 that the matter had been taken up with Mrs Duncan but there was no decision as yet on the course of action against her. There appears to be only one surviving report from the Wyre district of Lancashire dated April 3rd 1945; it states that Duncan gave two séances on the same day, March 5th, and it is reported: "Mrs. Duncan was drunk and the phenomena very unsatisfactory, every entity smelling of whisky." There were nineteen people present at the afternoon séance. A further séance was arranged for the next day, Tuesday March 6th, but Duncan never arrived, as she was in Blackpool and gave two séances.

The combination of these reports resulted in the removal of Helen Duncan's Spiritualists' National Union diploma.[7]

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What can be concluded from these reports?

It is clear these allegations were of a serious nature for the Spiritualist movement as a whole, especially to the SNU, as Helen Duncan was one of their diploma-holders, in essence representing the Union. We can note that Maurice Barbanell did not make these allegations headline news in 'Psychic News' but passed the main bulk of the complaint to the Union to deal with. At this time the Union's 'Freedom Committee' were very active on the Parliamentary pre-election pledges made by candidates that they would, if elected, help change the law on mediumship, and in February of this year Hannen Swaffer had addressed a meeting at the House of Commons. Helen had been released from Holloway prison for less than six months, so another full-scale criminal investigation would have had a devastating effect on the movement and would put the Union in poor light.

As already noted by Barbanell, Helen would not work fully under the auspices of the Union and in the past she had ignored the advice of experienced Spiritualists like John McIndoe and Maurice Barbanell about over-sitting. It may appear that this is one of the major problems in these allegations. No doubt Helen's response to the claims put against her did little for the SNU Council[8] and the Exponents and Education Committee to reach a more favourable decision regarding the removal of her diploma. It is presently unclear whether the Union made further investigations into these claims, which I believe to be doubtful, as Helen makes no other defence than her letter. We should recall also the long efforts of the 'Parliamentary and Freedom Fund'; it is reported that the Duncan trial cost the Fund, originally started in 1916, around £3,000 (I have not confirmed this figure). As the efforts to gain freedom from the Vagrancy Act and the Witchcraft Act were now more realistic with a change of government, it may have been felt, given the limited response of Helen to the allegations, that the Union had no option other than to withdraw her certificate!

[7] All the documentation (unless otherwise stated) is held in the Britten Memorial Museum at the Arthur Findlay College, Stansted Hall, Essex.

[8] Harold Vigurs, President; Mr A. Raffill, Vice-President; John McIndoe, Treasurer.

But what if the allegations had been more fully investigated?

For example:

The Union's complaint no. 5 stated that "when you arrived at the cottage your breath smelled of whisky." The Wyre district of Lancashire report stated: "Mrs. Duncan was drunk…"

Helen's response was:

> "I feel very indignant about the past smelt drink what a dam cheek & I can get those who were in contact with me to prove otherwise. I have never touched any drink in no way since before I was at Portsmouth & I resent it very much."

I am not sure how one can distinguish the different types of alcohol consumed from a person's breath and state it is whisky rather than, say, rum. In June 2015, during an exchange of information with one of Helen's granddaughters, Maggie Hahn, Maggie mentioned to me: "My sister knows how I feel about my gran and she sent me her address book and it had the letter, a medical statement about grandma emitting the smell of alcohol because of her diabetes." On further investigation it appears that diabetics can display symptoms similar to drunkenness and have a smell of alcohol on their breath.

The Séance:

Given the complex structure of physical mediumship and the physical depletion it causes in the medium's body with the extraction of ectoplasm, or, as Duncan's control, Albert, calls it, 'psychoplasm', over-exertion reduces the necessary energy required in the production of a successful séance, especially where full-form materialisation is demonstrated, as in the case of Helen Duncan. If we consider the séance which is at the centre of the complaint, neither the sitters nor the medium sat in what may be considered *conducive* and *harmonious* conditions to achieve the best possible results; it appears that that significant fact may have been overlooked!

The séance party of seventeen persons had been out to lunch and one or two had drunk alcohol. When they reached the séance location the medium had not arrived; in fact she was almost two hours late! The sitters "became restless and anxious". Helen arrived by taxi, unaccompanied; she was urged to rest but the medium "decided to carry on without delay". All moved into the séance room. The first report states that the "cabinet had been examined" (curtains across the corner of the room). The medium did not change into her séance clothes, generally part of her pre-séance procedure. The medium invited a search of her clothes she was wearing again; generally she was stripped and searched (the two reports are slightly conflicting).

Generally speaking, Duncan's séances were fairly well-lit and the séance procedure was quite consistent throughout her years of work. The séance in question is not typical. Duncan's control would announce himself as Albert, ask Mrs Duncan (how he addressed her) to stand up, then he would show himself and his medium together, a prayer would be said and a singing of a hymn. None of this is mentioned in the reports.

The first report, signed by four of the sitters, shows the phenomena were very weak and unsatisfactory. The actual séance is reported to be less than thirty minutes in duration! Given the above problems the circumstances were not *conducive* and *harmonious*.

Despite warnings already mentioned by McIndoe and Barbanell for over-sitting Helen would still conduct two séances in a day; in fact, on the two occasions she was arrested, in Edinburgh in 1933 and Portsmouth in 1944, this was the case! We can note that Helen actually conducted three séances on March 5th! She gave two séances in the Wyre district, possibly one in the morning, followed by an afternoon séance, when nineteen people were present. This goes a long way to answering why Helen was so late and rushed when she attended the Wigan area. It is possible that this séance was her second again, hence the rush and short séance to return to the first venue for an evening séance. The actual séance times are not recorded. The distance between the two locations is forty-two miles! Given that she had three séances booked the following day but only attended two, this helps explain the poor results of the séances, which can only be looked upon as reckless and justifies the concerns about her conduct towards the movement and the SNU.

Did Helen resort to fraud or, given her drained physical constitution, did she become subjected to a subconscious influence, as concluded by the writer of the report? Do mediums consciously premeditate fraud or do low, mischievous spirits carry out the fraud unconsciously? Some will argue that the medium premeditated the fraud and is therefore conscious and responsible for their actions, whilst others would say that owing to the influence of low, mischievous spirits or of the sitters in the séance the medium is totally unaware of their actions, as they are in a somnambulistic state and therefore cannot be accountable for their *unconscious* actions. For example, in August 1877 Catherine (Kate) Elizabeth Wood (1854-1884) was headlined "Miss Wood Caught Personating a Spirit". The report stated: "During the unconscious state the medium is made the victim of the circumstances by which she is surrounded, and either through the perverted action of some of her own controls, or the intrusion of other spirits, she is reduced to the disgraceful position in which she was found."

However, whatever conclusion is reached by the reader, not all the accusations levied against her are fair or correct.

For example:

SNU complaint no. 4 (b): "that before the séance neither you nor the cabinet was searched in the presence of witnesses." This is not strictly true.

Sitters suggest fraud: Duncan brought the "white stuff" into the room – the "white stuff" was hidden in the drawer or cupboard in the cabinet – the "white stuff" was muslin or such.

It was the sitters who searched the medium, as signed by five sitters (including the writer of the report): "…medium then left the room to be searched and, on returning, entered the cabinet…" It is very strange to consider that a cabinet (curtains across a corner of the room) would in fact have these convenient hiding-places: how would Helen know this in advance or did she enter the cabinet before the start of the séance? There is no evidence to support this; as Mrs Duncan stated in her letter: "I do think in all fairness to me they might have complained at the time and have given me a chance to defend myself anyway."

The list of the allegations could be further discussed but what degree of fraud was involved, if any, will remain speculative, given the passing of seven decades. If Helen Duncan had stood her ground, giving further explanations, and had invited investigations to be carried out by the SNU, the outcome would have, at the very least, been more balanced and definitive. The greater concern in the removal of her diploma may have been her recklessness, having

little regard to the management of her own mediumship, as is evident in the reports and comments. Helen's mediumship never regained the quality and support of her pre-trial days.



Morse & Vango



James J. Morse was one of the finest trance mediums the movement has ever produced. The photograph shows his daughter Florence standing, with Mrs Morse sitting on her left. The gentleman standing is J. J. Vango, a well-known and respected medium, with his wife seated in front of him. But who was the dog? This photograph was found in the Museum archives at the Arthur Findlay College; I was overjoyed, as I had never seen a good image of Florence Morse.

The photograph is quite unique, as what are generally called spirit extras are normally produced under conditions conducive to this type of physical mediumship. Here we have what appears to be a human face of a man on a dog's body! We do not know who took the photograph but notably absent is James Morse.

It would appear the photograph is at least a hundred years old; Mrs Morse passed over, after a long illness consequent on shock from air-raids, in November 1917 and her husband James died two years later on February 19th 1919. Florence became a well-known trance medium and speaker in her own right, giving her first lecture in 1907. She had toured abroad with her father and addressed large meetings in New Zealand and Australia. Her father founded the Lyceum Banner in 1890 and Florence had acted as editor; she also supported her father in the war effort. (See Pioneer, April 2014, "The Story of the Motor Ambulances – A Landmark in the History of Our Cause".)

Florence was the only child, born on July 3rd 1871. She was brought up surrounded by her parents' Spiritualist colleagues. Florence died of a heart attack on February 26th 1934; from her obituary published in the 'Two Worlds', March 2nd 1934, a few quotes are below:

> It is interesting to recall that she knew the Fox Sisters, Maggie and Leah. Katie she did not meet, but she was a great admirer of their courage and the work they performed in the face of tremendous opposition. She was for some years in close association with Andrew Jackson Davis.
>
> … she received the first money she ever had from Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten! Mrs. Britten sent her a birthday present when she was only a few days old. She grew up to know Mrs. Britten as "a great lady, extremely dignified, possessing a very impressive

personality, and seeming to exalt a meeting by her presence on the platform. People who met her in public sometimes thought she was slighly 'stiff and stand offish ' but in private life her manner was quite gracious and homely. She was in fact a kindly and sympathetic soul and accomplished a magnificent work for Spiritualism."



Florence Alice Emma Morse did not marry, so when she died in 1934 it was the end of the Morse family. Her money was willed to the Spiritualists' National Union and her wish was for this to become part of the 'Fund of Benevolence' under the title 'J. J. & Florence Morse Fund'. Her old friend, Mrs Minnie Harriet Wallis, had founded the Fund of Benevolence in 1893. (See Pioneer, April 2014: "Badges, Symbols, and Emblems of the Spiritualists' National Union".) Ernest Oaten was one of the trustees of the will. Her father's possessions were willed to the Trustees of the Britten Memorial, Manchester; this included one of James Morse's prized possessions, a large drawing in pencil by Wella Anderson, done in September 1875, of his chief control, 'Tien Sien Tie', a Chinese mandarin. This is today displayed in the Britten Memorial Museum housed at the Arthur Findlay College, Stansted Hall.

J. J. Vango had been associated with James Morse for almost four decades, when Morse suddenly died in 1919. Vango was born in London on February 12th 1861. He developed his mediumship and started his work in 1879, and was well known for his platform work as a clairvoyant. It can be noted that he was still working in 1936. Vango was one of the mediums for William Stead's 'Julia's Bureau', which was officially opened on April 24th 1909; information on the Bureau can be found in Psypioneer, April 2012.

Gladys Osborne Leonard, in her 'My Life in Two Worlds', originally published in 1931, refers to Vango:

> About a week later I got the impression that Dada would like me to go to a medium so that he could speak to me, so I attended a circle held by the well-known trance medium, Mr. J. J. Vango. Mr. Vango did not know me, but soon after going into trance he described my father exactly as he was in his earth life, giving his name, the way he passed over, and many other details, which made me quite sure it was my father whom he described. Mr. Vango then told me about my father's visit to me, and how pleased he was that I had seen him, and that he would keep in touch with me from "Over There." Other messages followed. It was a remarkably evidential and comforting sitting.

In 'Light', August 30th 1930, page 446, Vango wrote about some of his early experiences relating the difficulties the mediums encountered. He mentions one incident with his friend James Morse:

> Platform workers had a difficult time in earlier days. I remember when the late Mr. J. J. Morse lectured to a crowded meeting in the Midlands. Among the audience was a small hostile group that had gathered for the purpose of upsetting the meeting. The ringleader was a Mr. Hillier, who, when Morse began his trance address, started a noisy demonstration. Indignant members in the hall tried to put a stop to this disturbance but

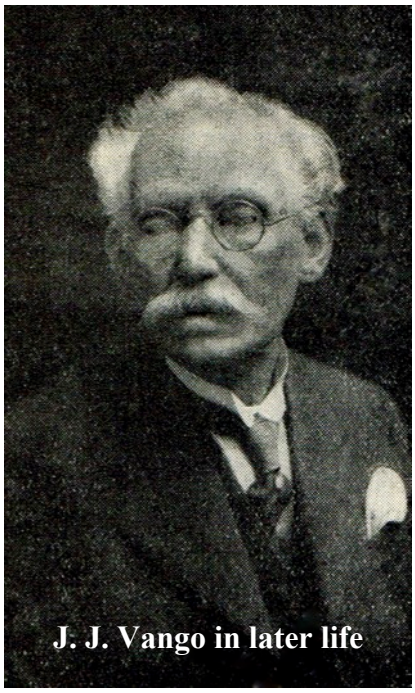
Morse's control said, "Let him alone, for the next time we meet our friend he will be one of us." The hostile element, however, was so strong that they endeavoured to rush the platform, and Morse had to be smuggled out by a back door. Many years later Morse lectured again in the same hall. This time the meeting was presided over by his former opponent, Mr. Hillier, so that the prediction was fulfilled. For a long time afterwards Morse and Hillier used to meet at my house on the best of good terms.


J. J. Morse

Vango continued:

I recall a gentleman who came to one of my seances in the early years. He said, "I am a criminal lawyer. I would like to have you before me for a couple of hours and I would do my best to get you ten years." However, he turned up at a seance some two years later and asked me if I remembered the incident. I replied that it was not a thing I would readily forget. He said, "I was that man. On my wife's advice I have been investigating and I find now there is more in it than I thought. I offer you my full apologies, which I hope you will accept." Needless to say I accepted them readily.

After many years' work I have many happy memories. I cannot claim to have done a great work. I have always stood for the truth and have been privileged to bring comfort to many in their deepest grief. I know that my brother and sister Mediums all over the country must rejoice as I do when they look back on the fruits of their labours.


J. J. Vango in later life

What we did before Stansted

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In the early days of the Union, generally the only time members from the various regions met was at the yearly AGM, at various Conferences, or maybe on a coach trip to various demonstrations or day events, probably organised by one of the District Councils. At the Bristol AGM, July 1925, an ambitious scheme was accepted, to have joint Educational Committees of the British Spiritualists' Lyceum Union and the S.N.U. under the style and title of the National Spiritualist College. It comprised a three-year course of study with yearly examinations and terminal certificates (see the last issue of Pioneer, "Early S.N.U Education History…"). Despite the title, the 'National Spiritualist College', it was in reality a correspondence course.

At around this period the Union discussed another venture, an 'S.N.U. Summer School'. This would comprise a wide programme over a three-week period of studies, lectures, circles, private sittings and social, etc. The school would be open to all members of SNU Churches, subscribing members and Lyceums; non-members would pay 20% extra. A double-bedded room for two would cost £3 3s. per person per week, dormitories with single beds at £2 17s 6d per week. The first Summer School was held at Colet House School, The Promenade, Rhyl, North Wales from August 6th to August 27th 1927 inclusive. The lecturers and demonstrators engaged were Harry Boddington, whose chosen subject was healing, Ernest Oaten on mediumship, Ernest Keeling and George Cole on the philosophy of Spiritualism, George Berry on the history of Spiritualism and Arthur Whyman on séances and readings. The general opinion was that the venture had been a huge success, although there were only twenty-six students and lecturers present in each of the first two weeks.

Below is a report from the fifth Summer School taken from the Union's 'National Spiritualist', official journal, August 1932:

The fifth Spiritualists' Summer School

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The fifth Spiritualists Summer School held at Gourock on the famous Clyde Coast has come and gone, and the Fellowship of the Summer School lives on in anticipation of future experiments. In passing a vote of thanks to the Lecturers and Chairmen, the suggestion was made that Churches should seriously consider the wisdom of selecting a budding medium and send him to any future Summer Schools for helpful tuition and experience. So pleased was another enthusiast by the scope of the Lectures and the values of the Psychic Demonstrations, that he saw in the summer School the possibilities of a revived School of the Prophets.

This year's School differed from its predecessors in several particulars and a consideration of these may help to point the way to the organisation of succeeding Summer Schools. The School ran for two weeks instead of three, and the period was changed from the end of July and the first half of August to the last week in June and the first week in July. It is to be noted that this change did not adversely affect the number attending. At the Weston-super-Mare School in 1930 there were 50 bookings for the first two weeks. This year, including the speakers and mediums there were 56 bookings. The

third week in previous Summer Schools has been the cause of our financial losses. This year's effort will show small loss, if any.



Summer School Students.

The hostel charges were on a different scale and paid direct to the Manageress; and the expenses of this year's School have been met by a booking fee of 5/0 per head plus a small surplus on the bookings for the Seances. These changes perhaps make the financial comparison difficult.

Another difference was the experiment of holding the School as an adjunct to the Annual General Meeting of the Union. Not all the students attended the Annual Conference. For a first experiment the numbers attending the A.G.M. may be regarded as satisfactory, and might well improve if tried over a number of years. Some students were leaving the School, some were arriving, and with the attention of the Council concentrated on the A.G.M. those who remained at the School over the Conference week-end found themselves at a loose end with the activities of the School suspended.

A more important difference was the definite engagement of noted mediums and the organisation of seances. In each week four evenings were devoted to seances and in the afternoons a number of small group seances were held or private sittings were given. As in former years morning lectures were given, four in the first week and three in the second. This meant the abandonment of a feature that was part of the charm of previous Summer Schools. It was not found practicable to arrange afternoon excursions which included nearly the whole of the students in residence. The excursions were taken in small groups with fairly large groups for each Friday.

There were no evening Socials, no community singing and music. The closing hours of each day were devoted to the all familiar 'circle.' The nonprofessional mediums—eagerly supported by the whole school—demonstrated their powers in their own way. The 1932 Spiritualists Summer School was above all else a school for the display of varied mediumistic activities.

The Phenomena.

For the student of psychic phenomena, the school offered unique opportunities. Mrs. Duncan, Edinburgh gave materialising seances as well as demonstrations of direct writing without physical contact. Mrs. Bullock, Manchester, gave seances for 'transfiguration,' while as already indicated the non-professional mediums demonstrated several distinct types of manifestation.

Materialisations.

A convenient dressing room behind the Cabinet was used for the precautionary examination and disrobing of Mrs. Duncan and to don the special seance costume. When ready to sit, the dressing room door was locked and the key retained by one of the sitters. 'Albert' the guide took control and at each seance showed himself apart from his medium, and then the medium and some manifesting entity side by side. I missed the great display of lights which marked the Manchester seances but there were many affectionate reunions, and some very intimate conversations. In quite a large number of cases the visitor was gripped by the hand of some spirit friend; some were kissed. In one instance a sitter was asked to take careful note of the fine hair on the back of a man's hand and compare it with that of a young girl spirit, as well as the hand of Mrs. Duncan when she came out of trance. One spirit friend had passed out with heart trouble, and his widow was asked to note the beating of the heart and compare it with the heart rhythm of the medium. On the last evening relatives of mine manifested. A girl just entering her twenties and who had passed away 40 years ago, and her mother who passed but a few years ago. Their hands were placed in mine and I felt the delicate hand of a young woman and noted its difference from that of the older woman who had lived with us prior to her passing.

Lively Peggy, the child control, came each evening and eased the tension of an atmosphere heavy with unexpressed emotion. One night a chair was left too near the curtains. A spirit friend moved it from one side of the corner to the other. The curtain became entangled with the chair legs and nearly brought the whole down. In the darkness a lady stood on the chair to replace the curtains and pin them in position again. She reported that as she put her hands over the cross-bar her fingers were touched by something having a phosphorescent glow.

One entity came twice in the last week. At her first appearance she was unable to say anything, and 'Albert' gave his impression that she had died by drowning. On the second occasion she was able to confirm this. 'Albert' declared that she was standing in a pool of water which dripped from her clothing. We examined the floor of the cabinet after the seance had closed. The floor was bone dry but very significantly, I and several others felt drops of water sprinkled on us at least twice. Having previously prepared the cabinet I can vouch for the fact that no water or other liquid was present in the room or cabinet. To another sitter a picture which hung on the wall a considerable distance from the cabinet was taken from the wall and placed in her lap.

The last night was remarkable for a fulfilled prophecy made 20 years ago in New Zealand. A visitor from that country had the great privilege of a long sustained conversation with her husband in spirit. She told us afterwards that she was present at a seance in New Zealand where her husband passed away and was then told that she would find herself in Great Britain 20 years hence and would be in a materialising seance at which only nine persons were present, and she would see and talk with her husband. Including the medium there were but nine sitters that evening; and the lady had come from New Zealand early this year in anticipation of the fulfilment of the prophecy. 'Albert' discovered that the lady was familiar with the district in which his old home was situated and gave her the address with the promise that if she called and mentioned him, she would be made welcome.

Direct Writing Tests.

The Direct Writing tests were excellent. Mrs. Duncan sat in full daylight at a small table round which was grouped some 13 or 14 persons, sitting together as closely as the table would permit. She took a small pad on which was placed sheets of paper torn from a writing pad brought into the room by one of the sitters after the group was formed. On the top of the sheets of writing paper a pencil was placed with its point towards the medium. Mrs. Duncan took the paper and pencil in one hand and held the whole pressed against the underside of the table. A table cloth hanging down over the sides afforded the necessary darkness. Her other hand was on the top of the table supporting her stooping attitude. Meanwhile she chatted with the sitters on general topics. Ten of the group had spirit friends named, and from whom they asked written questions. The answers were intelligent, fully appropo of the question asked, and in some instances contained welcome news or pleasing prophecies. When the messages were completed, the pencil could be heard falling to the ground, and in every instance was picked up by a sitter. After the pencil was on the ground three distinct raps were heard on the table. This was the signal to bring up the pad and examine the writing.

Transfigurations.

Mrs. Bullock has deservedly won popularity with her demonstrations of transfigurations. From my point of view the term does not exactly describe the type of mediumship revealed. A more correct description would be impersonation. For real transfiguration there should be a covering of extoplasmic material over the face of the medium. Upon this extoplasmic base the manifesting entity would mould the likeness of his own features. It is a well recognised type of phenomena. Mrs. Bullock sits in a darkened room with a strong red light thrown on her face. She puts over her shoulders a dark hood so that the face is thrown into sharp relief from the surrounding darkness. The first to manifest are her special guides who help her in this work; a Japanese, a Red Indian for power and others. The ease with which these guides manipulate the mobile features of the medium is truly extraordinary. In rapid succession we see startlingly life-like portraits of the different guides. When we reflect that these guides have had innumerable opportunities to use their medium in this way their success is understandable. It explains why, when other entities come who have not had the same access to the medium, and are now trying for the first or a second or third time only that their success is not so great. Those who sit regularly with Mrs. Bullock declare that their spirit friends gradually gather the power to mould a perfect likeness of themselves. For those who have sat but once or rarely such perfection is not vouchsafed, and one must look for the fleeting likeness or some characteristic pose or attitude reinforced by the evidential nature of the messages given. The sympathetic or ardent sitter will get more than the severely and coldly critical, the regular sitter most of all. Even in the difficult conditions of the single seance and strange sitters, the reports of crowded meetings testifies to the popularity and satisfying nature of the demonstrations. Some highly satisfactory delineations and messages were received by the Summer School sitters.[9]

[9] For information and images of Mrs Elizabeth Frances Bullock please see Psypioneer, Volume 8, No. 6, June 2012.

Clairvoyance and Personations.

Mrs. Wilby, Manchester, gave good service during the closing hours circle. Her clairvoyance and messages were excellent examples of the type which makes for successful platform demonstrations. Markedly different was the work of Mr. Bogue, Gateshead on Tyne. By a species of dumb show Mr. Bogue indicates the sex and physical characteristics of the manifesting spirit. By the same method there follows a portrayal of the conditions prevailing at the time of the passing. For instance, to see the medium sway as if suffering from vertigo, and then fall to the ground in simulation of sudden death, leaves little room for doubt as to the identity of a relative or friend whose end was known. A young Nottingham Lyceumist whose funeral service I had taken manifested to myself. She came again the next evening through Mrs. Duncan and delighted everyone present by her childish recital of Lyceum Pearls.

Still another type was presented by Mrs. Harper, Aberdeen. The manifesting entities seem unable or unwilling to give their name, relationship, or any description that would identify them. Instead the sitter is invited to tell over the names of any friends whom he knows has passed. When by a process of elimination the right name is pronounced the spirit controlling demonstrates unmistakably his pleasure. In like manner all other necessary information for complete identification is sought and found. It is a process as lengthy as taking down a long message through the alphabetic code of table tilting, which was in fact our last experiment.

We repeat the 1932 Summer School was above all else, a school for the demonstration of mediumistic activity. It revealed a great variety of power and phenomena. We saw each medium developing on his or her own line and producing phenomena various as the moods and characters of humanity itself. In like manner, and following the same law of variation, each investigator finds some type of demonstration which pleases him best, and which singly or in combination with other types assures him of the tremendous fact of Survival.

GEO. F. BERRY.
Dipl. S.N.U.

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The SNU Summer School became an ongoing popular event for around fifty years, drawing many of the top mediums and speakers. Tom and Mabel Hibbs were two well-known Welsh Spiritualists; Tom in some reports is referred to as the 'Summer School Pioneer'. He was for many years the secretary of the South Wales District Council; in 1950 the SNU National Council honoured him by appointing him Honorary Vice-President of the Union. Tom died in November 1955, aged 66; the photograph shows Tom and Mabel (bottom left) at the Porthcawl Summer School in 1950. The photograph is a large panoramic group showing over a hundred students; some notable names can be recognised: Gladys Mallaburn, Joe Capstack, Bertha Harris, Minnie Bridges, Eric Hatton and Union Presidents Harry Dawson and John Stewart. But who is the young boy shown on the image? See footnote 10.

Incidentally, Mabel Hibbs conducted the wedding service for former SNU President Eric Hatton on December 27th 1955; Tom had died shortly before. The 'Two Worlds' series, "Meet the S.N.U. National Council", April 8th 1949, gives this short profile:

> Mrs. M. D. Hibbs has the honour of being the only woman on the National Council of the Spiritualists' National Union. With eleven years to her credit, she has one of the longest records of service, only Messrs. McIndoe, Stewart and Dawson having served longer.
>
> In the South Wales District, which she represents, she is regarded as a great leader and Mr. Hopkins, District Secretary,[10] has stated that this District owes its many successes, chiefly to the careful supervision and encouragement given by Mrs. Hibbs in the many aspects of the work.

[10] John C. Hopkins was Secretary in 1949; he was David Hopkins' father. Both were/are Ministers of the Union; the young boy is David, about age 9. Difficult to recognise him without the beard! Behind David is his father and the lady between him and Mabel Hibbs is his mother, Edna. Both his parents were very active within the Summer Schools. David commented: "I know that the South Wales folks were very proud of the School and always felt that it was the model for many later activities across the country, including the early days at Stansted." If any readers have any of the old programs these would be most welcome for the Britten Memorial Museum.

Great Organiser

Her great organising ability has long since been recognised, and out of thirty years membership, eighteen years have been spent as church secretary, sixteen years as a member of the South Wales District Council, (four as Vice-President), and the last five years as President. She is also a Spiritualist minister. The Treherbert S.N. Church, which is a great credit to the Movement, was founded and built largely as a result of Mrs. Hibbs's efforts.

Social Work

She is well known as a leader in other walks of life, thus demonstrating to others that Spiritualists carry their principles into practice. During the war she worked unceasingly to provide funds for the benefit of those serving in the forces, served as local representative on the Citizens Advice Bureau, and will long be remembered for her great efforts as secretary of the Local Food Control Dept. during the days of the great depression in the Rhondda Valley.

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David Hopkins told me:

I think the South Wales folk of the time saw 'their' school as something new and unique, not a 'development of anything national that had gone before but rather something innovative, in that it provided a week-long event that covered a range of interests in Spiritualist activities and also a strong social/'fun' element – perhaps of considerable importance in those early post-war years. I suppose there was a strong element of 'learning and laughing together.'

People were 'billeted' locally, in homes or small 'B&Bs' (or larger establishments if they wanted). This kept costs down. The schools attracted people from all over the country, offering a 'fellowship' based on mutual interest and friendship. As you have seen, the 'line-up' over the years was pretty impressive.

The 'initiation ceremony' (everyone went through it on their first visit) meant that everybody was treated the same – there was no hierarchy. The 'ceremony' included the new students being instructed in a special 'chant' (I suppose it would be a mantra today!). They had to say

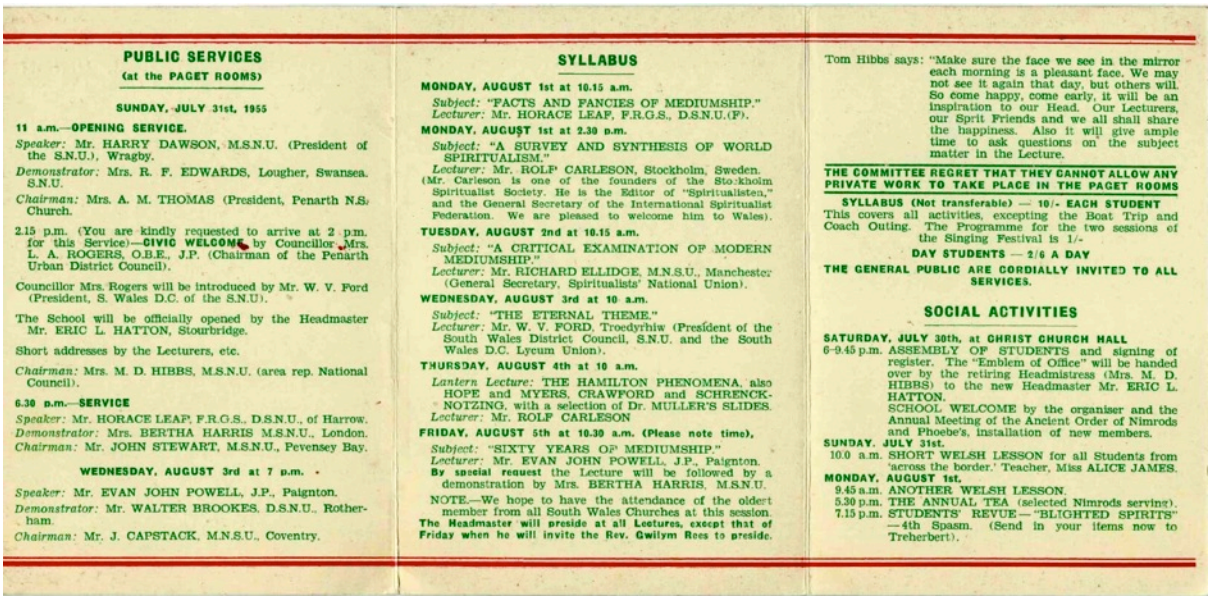
'OH' then 'AH' then 'TA' followed by 'NA' and finally (quickly) 'SIAM.'

They then 'joined' these to say 'OH AH TA NA SIAM', gradually getting quicker then singing the words over and over to the tune of the National Anthem. By then it had become:

OH WHAT AN ASS I AM.

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Below is shown part of the 1955 programme July 30th-August 5th at Penarth. Kindly supplied by David Hopkins.



PUBLIC SERVICES
(at the PAGET ROOMS)

SUNDAY, JULY 31st, 1955

11 a.m.—OPENING SERVICE.

Speaker: Mr. HARRY DAWSON, M.S.N.U. (President of the S.N.U.), Wragby.

Demonstrator: Mrs. R. F. EDWARDS, Lougher, Swansea. S.N.U.

Chairman: Mrs. A. M. THOMAS (President, Penarth N.S. Church.

2.15 p.m. (You are kindly requested to arrive at 2 p.m. for this Service)—**CIVIC WELCOME** by Councillor Mrs. L. A. ROGERS, O.B.E., J.P. (Chairman of the Penarth Urban District Council).

Councillor Mrs. Rogers will be introduced by Mr. W. V. Ford (President, S. Wales D.C. of the S.N.U.).

The School will be officially opened by the Headmaster Mr. ERIC L. HATTON, Stourbridge.

Short addresses by the Lecturers, etc.

Chairman: Mrs. M. D. HIBBS, M.S.N.U. (area rep. National Council).

6.30 p.m.—SERVICE

Speaker: Mr. HORACE LEAF, F.R.G.S., D.S.N.U., of Harrow.
Demonstrator: Mrs. BERTHA HARRIS M.S.N.U., London.
Chairman: Mr. JOHN STEWART, M.S.N.U., Pevensey Bay.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3rd at 7 p.m.

Speaker: Mr. EVAN JOHN POWELL, J.P., Paignton.
Demonstrator: Mr. WALTER BROOKES, D.S.N.U., Rotherham.
Chairman: Mr. J. CAPSTACK, M.N.S.U., Coventry.

SYLLABUS

MONDAY, AUGUST 1st at 10.15 a.m.

Subject: "FACTS AND FANCIES OF MEDIUMSHIP."
Lecturer: Mr. HORACE LEAF, F.R.G.S., D.S.N.U.(F).

MONDAY, AUGUST 1st at 2.30 p.m.

Subject: "A SURVEY AND SYNTHESIS OF WORLD SPIRITUALISM."
Lecturer: Mr. ROLF CARLESON, Stockholm, Sweden.
(Mr. Carleson is one of the founders of the Stockholm Spiritualist Society. He is the Editor of "Spiritualisten," and the General Secretary of the International Spiritualist Federation. We are pleased to welcome him to Wales).

TUESDAY, AUGUST 2nd at 10.15 a.m.

Subject: "A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF MODERN MEDIUMSHIP."
Lecturer: Mr. RICHARD ELLIDGE, M.N.S.U., Manchester (General Secretary, Spiritualists' National Union).

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3rd at 10 a.m.

Subject: "THE ETERNAL THEME."
Lecturer: Mr. W. V. FORD, Troedyrhiw (President of the South Wales District Council, S.N.U. and the South Wales D.C. Lyceum Union).

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4th at 10 a.m.

Lantern Lecture: THE HAMILTON PHENOMENA, also HOPE and MYERS, CRAWFORD and SCHRENCK-NOTZING, with a selection of Dr. MULLER'S SLIDES.
Lecturer: Mr. ROLF CARLESON

FRIDAY, AUGUST 5th at 10.30 a.m. (Please note time),

Subject: "SIXTY YEARS OF MEDIUMSHIP."
Lecturer: Mr. EVAN JOHN POWELL, J.P., Paignton.
By special request the Lecture will be followed by a demonstration by Mrs. BERTHA HARRIS, M.S.N.U.

NOTE.—We hope to have the attendance of the oldest member from all South Wales Churches at this session.
The Headmaster will preside at all Lectures, except that of Friday when he will invite the Rev. Gwilym Rees to preside.

Tom Hibbs says: "Make sure the face we see in the mirror each morning is a pleasant face. We may not see it again that day, but others will. So come happy, come early, it will be an inspiration to our Head. Our Lecturers, our Sprit Friends and we all shall share the happiness. Also it will give ample time to ask questions on the subject matter in the Lecture.

THE COMMITTEE REGRET THAT THEY CANNOT ALLOW ANY PRIVATE WORK TO TAKE PLACE IN THE PAGET ROOMS

SYLLABUS (Not transferable) — 10/- EACH STUDENT
This covers all activities, excepting the Boat Trip and Coach Outing. The Programme for the two sessions of the Singing Festival is 1/-

DAY STUDENTS — 2/6 A DAY

THE GENERAL PUBLIC ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ALL SERVICES.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

SATURDAY, JULY 30th, at CHRIST CHURCH HALL
6-9.45 p.m. ASSEMBLY OF STUDENTS and signing of register. The "Emblem of Office" will be handed over by the retiring Headmistress (Mrs. M. D. HIBBS) to the new Headmaster Mr. ERIC L. HATTON.
SCHOOL WELCOME by the organiser and the Annual Meeting of the Ancient Order of Nimrods and Phoebe's, installation of new members.

SUNDAY, JULY 31st.
10.0 a.m. SHORT WELSH LESSON for all Students from 'across the border.' Teacher, Miss ALICE JAMES.

MONDAY, AUGUST 1st.
9.45 a.m. ANOTHER WELSH LESSON.
5.30 p.m. THE ANNUAL TEA (selected Nimrods serving).
7.15 p.m. STUDENTS' REVUE—"BLIGHTED SPIRITS" —4th Spasm. (Send in your items now to Treherbert).



Photograph of SNU President Harry Dawson and General Secretary Richard (Dick) Ellidge

1958 South Wales Summer School

Although there was an ongoing success with the Summer Schools, the Union did not have a permanent location to run courses, training and development, etc. The first, I believe, to see the need and importance of the facilities within the movement was Emma Hardinge Britten. William Stead in his 'Borderland' journal for October 1995 (pages 354-355) publishes an appeal from Emma:

WANTED: A COLLEGE FOR MEDIUMS



MRS. HARDINGE BRITTEN has been appealing to the Spiritualists, through the columns of their weekly organ, for support to found a College for Mediums. She Says:—

The first pre-requisite for this proposed Training College is a commodious house, with, if possible, some ground attached and, here let me say, it can scarcely be doubted that there are some rich property owners, spiritually inclined enough to devote a house and lands to the *experiment, at least*, of the noble purpose under consideration. The house required should be large enough to accommodate from twelve to twenty young persons (we will say in the first instance of the female sex), together with a good motherly matron or housekeeper, a well-informed governess competent to teach the scholars various branches of literature and art (especially music), and in highly mediumistic person who, by aid of experience and study, should be able to organize the circles and devote herself, in a manner somewhat analogous to the ordinary spiritual Lyceum exercises, especially to the moral as well as spiritual culture of the scholars. Besides these permanent officials there should be a council of interested managers, who should meet at stated periods and aid in drawing up rules and superintending their practical application. At least three circles should be held each week for the purpose of unfolding and practising the mediumistic powers of the inmates, and regular services should be given every Sunday, attended by such members of the council and their friends as could be present. The scholars qualified for admission should be persons endowed with some mediumistic gift, and recommended by, or known to, members of the council, who could vouch alike for their capacity and worth. Whilst it is essential and right that the matron, governess, and mediumistic controller should be paid employes, the scholars admitted for set terms of time and periods should be received and entertained free of all cost.

When good speakers or mediums were found to be fitted for public work they should be allowed to go to societies or families applying to the college officials, and though that service should in all justice and honour be paid for, as long as the parties employed remained attached to the college, their fees should be devoted solely to the maintenance of the institution. This provision would not only aid the support of the gratuitous home supplied to the mediums, but it would also avoid the terrible temptations to which some paid mediums have unhappily yielded, viz., to resort to fraud, when the spirit power, which they could not always command, failed them.

In this initial sketch I do not attempt to enter into those varied and important details of internal management which can only be devised in careful council and regulated by expediency; but I should urge that the most sublime and exalted exercises of music should be practised, and the scholars taught how to cultivate the ground—if there be any attached to the house—with a view of raising fruit, herbs, and vegetables, for medicinal as well as edible purposes, no less than as contributing to the maintenance of the house.

A house, land, and some endowment, and gifts or subscriptions enough to pay officials and maintain the grand experiment, for at least one year, should surely be forthcoming from those whose wealth could meet the demand, and whose knowledge must assure them that their stewardship of that very wealth will determine their happiness or misery when they themselves become spirits.

James Arthur Findlay was only twelve when Emma published her appeal; Findlay did, however, have a full set of Stead's 'Borderland' in his library at Stansted Hall and one could *tentatively* wonder if he had read Emma's appeal. In 1948 Mr W. Lorraine Haig became President of the Union and the following year's AGM was held in Edinburgh on July 2nd 1949. Education was the main theme, the focus being on larger but fewer churches. Haig emphasised that the churches were splitting up into small groups, creating a greater demand on speakers and demonstrators, hence lowering the standards. The S.N.U. could not cope with these extra demands, thus the need for emphasising the bonuses of an all-round education scheme.

The President emphasised:

A Spiritualist's College



If we wish to achieve fully our plans in the future, we must have a training centre 'a place of our own' so to speak, where every phase of our work will be taught by qualified teachers. A place where men and women – for the outlay of an amount of money within their reach or of the Society who may sponsor them – can attend for special courses.

In this – for lack of a special name – "College for the Advancement of Psychic Science," there will be courses for speakers, development classes for mediums, classes for Spiritualists who want to specialise in any suitable subject. Short Summer courses for those who require further tuition, *i.e.*, Presidents and Executives alike.

Indeed, all the subjects coming under the heading of "Psychic Science" will be part of the curriculum. *Great is the need for such a college*.

Haig continued:

I am certain that within the next twenty-five years a "College for Psychic Science" will be established in this country, and with that faith I am trying today to prepare the mind of the membership to be ready, when the time comes, to grasp the great opportunity

> with both hands. Yes! grasp it with both hands, so that we may make this "Place of our Own' a model for all the countries in the world to imitate, and at the same time, make it a living memorial to the souls whose work and goodwill will be responsible for bringing it about.[11]

Haig's certainty of a Spiritualist College *within the next twenty-five years* was based on ongoing talks, presumably not generally known outside the Union. General Secretary Dick Ellidge stated in 1966:

> "It was early in 1945 that Mr J. Arthur Findlay first approached the Union regarding Stansted Hall when it was occupied by the Red Cross as a Convalescent Home and when he resided at Rockingham Castle, Market Harborough. This was followed in 1950 by personal contact with W. Lorraine Haig, then President of the Union, who appointed a President's Committee to investigate and report on a College for Spiritualism. But it was not until January, 1954, that Mr Findlay wrote to Mr H. Dawson, who had been elected President six months previously, followed by meeting at Stansted, that a direct and close liaison between the Hall and the Union was established. …"

For further details and references please see "The J. Arthur Findlay College for the Advancement of Psychic Science – The early years", Pioneer, Volume 1, No. 2, January 2014.

The College opened in 1964, mainly for meetings and weekends; in the first week of August 1965 the SNU Summer School occupied the College. The official opening took place on Saturday September 17 1966 by Mrs Wayne, daughter of Mr and Mrs J. A. Findlay.

She recalled that her father:

"tried to find answers to questions mankind has always asked.
This search eventually led his to Spiritualism."

"As a result of his writings and speeches there were people who did not agree with him," she said. "I remember one woman wrote to him and accused him of being in league with the Devil. We laughed. Daddy didn't mind. I didn't mind. And I don't think the Devil did either!"

Over 250 Spiritualists crowded into the Hall for the dedication service, Mrs Wayne on declaring the college open, quoted, "the words you have as your motto:

'May this house flourish'."

—~—☼—~—

[11] The above quotes were taken from the verbatim account of Lorraine Haig's AGM address on July 2nd, published in the 'Two Worlds', issues July 15th & 22nd 1949.

Early images of the Arthur Findlay College





⇑ *Original Reception location & Shop*

⇐ *Original Dining Room*

⇓*Bar Area*



Please note due to space:

The Effect of the Vagrancy Act (Part IV) – The Work of the Spiritualists' National Union will conclude in the next issue, and Education History will be continued.

—~—☼—~—