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SPR was conceived by Spiritualist

A leading London Spiritualist, whose name is not used in official SPR publicity, conceived the Society for Psychical Research, London.

Edmund Dawson Rogers was manager of the National Press Agency and business controller of the newspaper " Light" founded in 1881 .In his brief, posthumously published, memoirs he recalled:

" Professor W.F. Barrett was spending the night with me at my residence in Finchley, and we sat up to a late hour while he recounted some of his psychical experiences. In the course of his narration he mentioned the fact that so long ago as 1876 he read a paper to the British Association at Glasgow, principally on the subject of thought transference, and had urged the formation of a committee to investigate the subject, together with that of psychic phenomena and so-called Spiritualistic manifestations, which had been tested by Sir William Crookes.

" Nothing had come of this suggestion, however, and he had made other attempts, with a like result, to induce scientific and literary men of influence to look into the subject without prejudice.

"I suggested that a society should be started on lines which would be likely to attract some of the best minds which had hitherto held aloof from the pursuit of the enquiry. Professor Barrett approved of the suggestion, and called a conference of a few friends which was held in the rooms of the British National Association in January, 1882.

" At that meeting Mr Stainton Moses, Mr C.C. Massey, Mr F.W.H. Myers, Mr. J.G. Romanes, myself, and others were present. A committee

was appointed to formulate a plan, and it presented its report to an adjourned conference in February, 1882, when the society was definitely constituted.

The first Council comprised Mr Stainton Moses and myself, with some other well-known Spiritualists, including Mr. Hensleigh Wedgwood, Dr Wyld, Mr Alexander Calder, and Mr Desmond Fitzgerald."

(" Life and experiences of Edmund Dawson Rogers, Spiritualist and Journalist; reprinted from 'Light', London, Office of 'Light' 1910.)

According to the SPR web site, www.spr.ac.uk the Society was founded by " *a distinguished group of Cambridge scholars*". In a new study " An elusive Victorian- the evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace" (Chicago, 2004) Martin Fichman writes." *Barrett founded the London Society for Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882*." (p.111) Barrett however was not a Cambridge scholar.

Rogers or Barrett?

SPR members can consult through the Society's web site SPR Proceedings **55 "** The Founders of the S.P.R. by Fraser Nicol, who points out:

1) Rogers persuaded leading Spiritualist Stainton Moses to support the project.
2) The first meeting was in a Spiritualist meeting house.
3) The first hon. sec and hon. treasurer were both Spiritualists.
4) Most of the first Council were Spiritualists.
5) Rogers paid for the printed circulars calling the preliminary meeting.
6) Rogers employed the shorthand writer for this meeting.
7) The Society was founded on the formal motion of Stainton Moses.

But Brian Inglis, in his paper " Sir William Barrett (1844-1925)" in JSPR **55**, also available to SPR members through the web site, argues:

1) Only Barrett could have brought the Spiritualists, the Sidgwick group and scientists like Balfour Stewart together.
2) Barrett chaired the first meeting.
3) Barrett got the investigative committees to work and report, without delay, in 1882-3
4) He edited the Journal.
5) He had a long history, before and after 1882, of trying to interest the scientific community in the subject.

One might conclude that the formation of the SPR was an inspired group enterprise. Though control soon passed to a Cambridge-centred group, they were not the actual founders. We should also be aware that the term " Spiritualist" carried various meanings, often wider than today, and is not incompatible with the terms "scholar" or scientist".

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MILLIONS OF WITCHES BURNT – OR POSSIBLY NOT.

"During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astounding five million women " according to Robert Langdon, Professor of Religious Symbology at Harvard University. Langdon's revelation appears in Dan Brown's best seller " The Da Vinci Code".

However, investigation by the Pioneer has disclosed:

1) scholars generally, such as Brian P. Levack, " The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe", estimate up to 60,000 people died in the European witch persecutions.

2) many of these were men, in some countries the majority.

3) in England and certain other places, death was normally by hanging.

4) some trials were instigated by the central or local government for political or economic purposes.

5) The Inquisition was a restraining force. Deaths in countries where the Inquisition was active were much lower.

6) Robert Langdon is as fictitious as his arithmetic.

None of this is expected to have the slightest effect on popular beliefs about the witch persecutions.

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Time?

Has the time come for a regular gathering of students interested in the pioneers of the psychic field? In June 2003, a weekend conference of theosophical historians had participants from Japan, Finland, Holland and the USA? They puzzled whether Madame Blavatsky was mostly western or eastern, recalled the sensitive Mabel Collins who had Egyptian visitants, and took time out to hear how Queen Victoria's clairvoyant had been traced. The national Theosophical president welcomed them to his headquarters and the international vice-president was in attendance.

In the Autumn there were similar conferences of psychical researchers and of Christian parapsychologists. Ought students of the psychic pioneers to gather in the same way?

In the Historian's Chair

This feature from the original web site returns. The first guest is English Spiritualist historian, Paul Gaunt of Barnstaple.

Q HOW DID YOU GET INTO HISTORICAL RESEARCH?

People are often heard saying, 'If only I could live my life again, things would be so different'. My life perhaps could do with a few changes, but as far as my deep interest in historical research goes, a simple repeat performance would be more than enough.

My involvement into Spiritualism began around 1969, the culmination of All Hallows Eve, an ouija board, and fervid youth. The events that transpired that evening and the proceeding weeks were so spectacular to me, that until this day they remain the most evidential basis of my acceptance of an 'individual consciousness beyond the physical body'.

I soon became a member of my local Spiritualist church, spending much of my spare time with developing circles, and becoming church librarian; but after about three years of the church focusing only on clairvoyance, I became bored with their blinkered approach and tried in vain to have the order of the church service changed to allow for more addresses by visiting speakers and less, (as I considered it), prattling of mostly poor mediumship. The church consensus was that clairvoyance and its associated phenomena must be at the forefront of its activities.

I began to drift away from Spiritualism, and began to briefly look at other religions, like Christadelphians, Evangelical groups and the Bahai faith. I was not totally comfortable with these groups, but what struck me with all of them was the members' knowledge of their religion, a fact that seemed to be missing from Spiritualism. My own brief knowledge of its history had come purely from the books I had read, and not from the subject matter being offered in the church.

I attended an advertised meeting in Northampton, where a talk and demonstration was given by Gordon Higginson, a name I had not previously known. The hall was packed to capacity and after playful comments made by Mr. Higginson with regard to the removal of Christian hecklers, I spent the next two hours in complete engrossment. I learned of the Arthur Findlay College, wrote to them and secured a residential position on the staff. My duties were very flexible and so I was able to sit in any lectures and demonstrations as I wished. The SNU had moved their office to Stansted, making this a very interesting place to be, but with hindsight, I didn't really appreciate the unique position I was in. I was 'rubbing shoulders', with some of the most prominent mediums of the 70's, in a valuable position to gather experiences and knowledge from some of Spiritualism's elite. The winter months at the college were quiet, a skeleton staff remaining, myself included. , The lull should have allowed me to digest the contents of the college library, but I didn't see the importance of the

chance afforded me at the time, hence my reference to a repeat performance of my involvement with historical research!

After leaving the college, I was encouraged onto the platform by Helen Duncan's daughter Gina. I would give talks and she the demonstrations. Given the working relationship we had, I find it quite incredible that I not once asked her of her mother! I never had the desire to witness repeated phenomena. Although I sat many times in Gordon Higginson's materialisation séances my role was simply to prepare the room, lighting etc. I continued speaking for a few more years, and in 1982 moved completely away from Spiritualism.

It was not until I re-married and moved to Devon when in 1995, an old Spiritualist friend visited me and my interest in matters of the occult, namely Spiritualism was rekindled. I purchased a fairly large number of old books from him, as I had given my entire collection away some years earlier, and it was my intention to pick up where I had left off. I rejoined the SNU and commenced the advanced 'History of Spiritualism' course coupled with the basic courses with the view to gaining the LSNU award. I sustained a heart attack some time later and as a result used the recuperation period to put greater input into my studies. The advanced course required only two books as reference material, Conan Doyle's " History of Spiritualism" and Jean Bassett's " 100 Years of National Spiritualism", with an additional optional book if required (" Pioneers of the Unseen" by Paul Tabori) to answer a total of sixteen questions. Each of the sixteen essays required 2-3000 words. I began to research the questions in greater substance, building a substantial collection of 19th century material in the process.

Following one of the questions relating to the Seven Principles (a subject I had spoken on many times, but only in content and not origin) I began to delve into their origins.

Q) HOW HAS THE SPRITUALIST MOVEMENT REACTED TO YOUR FINDINGS ON THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES?

The reaction, or rather lack of it, was and is somewhat disappointing. Once my first article on the Principles appeared in Psychic News, I expected to have at least some preliminary feedback, damning or otherwise; but nothing was said. Three months after the article's publishing, Mr. Garth Willey, president of the Melbourne based 'Woodlands Sanctuary Spiritualist Foundation', made a reply, endorsing my concerns with regard to the SNU's education literature and its use of the history of the principles.

With continued research, I contributed a follow up article on the Principles, with more material on their origins, but remarkably nothing was received in reply in print by PN or their readers? The SNU made no attempt to respond or comment on my findings; a fact I find rather disturbing considering I sent, on two occasions, all relevant papers etc., to the chair of the education committee, including photocopies of the original documentation of the speech given by Emma Hardinge Britten at Cleveland Hall, on 30th April

1871 as reported in Medium and Daybreak; the speech which is the basis of the now Seven Principles. Copies of the Seed Corn Tracts released by James Burns referring to the Principles speech were also given.

I would have to say that on the whole, with the lack of response from both articles, it would seem that the history of Spiritualism does not play a very important part of belief to most Spiritualists, choosing blind acceptance over a questioning and factual understanding of their religion.

Q) YOU HAVE ONE OF THE LARGEST PRIVATE PSYCHIC LIBRARIES IN ENGLAND. IS THIS THE GOLDEN AGE FOR COLLECTORS?

From my point of view it is. Since the popularity of the internet, collectors like myself have a virtual front row seat, opening the doors to thousands of internationally based book stores, thus allowing us the opportunity to find rare titles which otherwise would have been unreachable.

The internet has also provided unique sites from which many out of print titles can be downloaded. Some sites offer facsimile copies of rare titles, and some have provided information on a wide and varied expanse of subject matter which would all too often have been unavailable en masse.

Over the last nine years, I have built up a fairly substantial library covering Spiritualism, Psychical Research and Mesmerism with additional works such as “Theosophical History” and “The Christian Parapsychologist”. Whilst my library is frequently added to, the hardest material to find are old journals. Unfortunately, it would seem that these items did not stand the test of time making them even more special to find and to me as a collector the original, such musky old pages of history holds its own rewards.

Q) IS THERE A SINGLE BOOK MOST USEFUL TO THE PSYCHIC HISTORIAN?

My personal answer to this question is NO. Like making a cake, many singular ingredients are needed to make the finished whole; and like the history of any subject, various accounts are needed to provide an informed definitive account. After all, history is not an exact science. If we were to allow ourselves to be blind sided by only one definition, we would be denying ourselves a truer more informed outlook.

But my personal favourite, one title I use more than any other in the subject of Spiritualism, is Emma Hardinge Britten’s 'Nineteenth Century Miracles'. The books covers the grown of Modern Spiritualism through many countries, provides detailed accounts on numerous mediums and organisations, and often gives recommended titles by other authors like Epes Sargent and Allen Putnam. So it is vital, in my opinion, not to limit thinking based on one single book or event, but to gather information on any given subject. That's when the benefits are reaped.

Q) YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING ON THE LIFE OF A.J. DAVIS, HOW SIGNIFICANT IS HE?

Andrew Jackson Davis is in my mind one of the most underestimated figures in Modern Spiritualism, because he is perhaps the least understood. He was an important link between the Mesmerised trance state and the mediumistic trance state - between being operated on by a mesmerist, to undergoing self-development.

His literary works are an encyclopaedia of immense value, over thirty books covering his essential principles of science, philosophy and religion. He pre-dates what is normally considered the advent of Modern Spiritualism - the Fox sisters of Hydesville - as Davis made a phenomenal mark in 1845 at the age of 18, giving a number of remarkable demonstrations of what we would call 'Astral Projection', or 'Travelling Clairvoyance', but which Davis himself would have called the 'Magnetic Condition or State'. As recorded by the Rev. Gibson Smith in Davis' first comparatively little known work - 'Lectures on Clairmativeness', published in 1845, Davis would, on request, 'astrally' travel to distant places in search of individuals designated by the requester. On one occasion Davis was reported to have 'travelled' to England giving the requester much information. Upon writing to England, this information was found to be entirely correct. Davis continued to write for the next 40 years.

Davis' significance in Modern Spiritualism is far more recognised in America, for example the National Spiritualist Association founded in 1893 states that 'Davis introduced Intellectual Spiritualism, while Kate Fox introduced Phenomenal Spiritualism'. Some may recall the SNU in recent years selling copies of the NSA centenary busts of Davis and Fox marking the centenary celebrations of the birth of Spiritualism. They also produced a facsimile of AJD's 1st autobiography of 1857 to celebrate 150 years of Modern Spiritualism. The British spiritualist E. Wake Cook in 1903 delivered an address at the LSA in which he praised Davis, calling him 'The Father of Modern Spiritualism'. Later he visited Davis (as reported in 'Light', Nov. 19th 1904), and found him “bright, young, and alert as ever, his face radiant with knowledge, love and charity.” I feel that Davis' full significance is still waiting to be fully unmasked.

Davis is intertwined with the fabric of what Spiritualism is; there is I would suggest, very little that the pen of Davis hasn't commented on or contributed towards. His writings seem on the surface somewhat confusing, but once put into context, there lies a simple philosophy of life explaining much of the philosophy of Spiritualism, giving wonderful insights of the spirit world, spirit communication, and graphic accounts of the separation of the body and soul at death. He founded the Children's Progressive Lyceum in 1863, an expression for physical and spiritual improvement for all, as well as giving us his ageless 'Harmonial Philosophy'. In my opinion, Andrew Jackson Davis is very significant to the history of Spiritualism, and in time, I would very much like this great man and his work to be fully recognised. *ENDS*

Paul Gaunt’s research into the Seven Principles is on line as part of the Journal Archive for www.woodlandway.org**.**

The Psychic Pioneer Project Reincarnates

Between 1999-2001, the web site www.psypioneer.com carried news stories and features about earlier workers in the psychic field. There were also four associated booklets. The emphasis was on the time before 1902. As we prepare for the return of the web site, here is a free electronic newsletter on the same subjects. We shall be starting simple, and gradually producing a more sophisticated product.

A number of individuals and organisations backed the original launch of the Psychic Pioneer Project, especially in the UK. Spiritual Truth Foundation was the lead donor. For the relaunch we especially acknowledge the help of an elder brother, and of Tony Hern on the technical side.

The newsletter should appear at least monthly. If you want to be on the mailing list, just send a message headed "Subscribe" to leslie.price@blueyonder,co,uk

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A.J. Davis (1)

MYSTERIOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN WESTERN NEW YORK

Williamsburg, March 31, 1848

About daylight this morning, a warm breathing passed over my face, suddenly waking me from a profound slumber: and I heard a voice, tender and yet peculiarly strong, saying:

" Brother! The good work has begun - behold, a living demonstration is born!"

…. The breathing and the voice ceased immediately, and I was left wondering what could be meant by such a message. *

- *Afterward I learned that, at this time, spirit communication was established at Hydesville, New York.*

This entry appears in the book by A.J. Davis " Events in the life of a seer: being memoranda of authentic facts in Magnetism, Clairvoyance, Spiritualism" (1868), p.100 though this quote is from the Fifth Edition published (and revised?) by Davis himself at the Progressive Publishing House, 1873. According to an introduction,

" The contents of the following pages are extracted from the author's private journal, and not before published in any of his many works on Spiritualism and Philosophy."

If it has survived it would be most interesting to see this entry in the Davis journal. Note that the Fox sisters are not named.

L.P.

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Biographical numbering. In this and later issues of the newsletter, readers may see items prefixed (e.g. A.J. Davis (1).) This is to make easy, reference over many months to items about major pioneers.