

THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALISM & FAMOUS MEDIUMS

The Fox Sisters (1831–1893)



The origin of mediumship is usually linked to the Fox sisters at Hydesville, Arcadia, New York in 1848. By 1853 the movement had reached San

Francisco and London, and by 1860 had spread worldwide. The Fox family remained very active in Spiritualism for many years.

On March 31, 1848, two of the sisters, Margaretta and Catherine Fox, established intelligent communication with a spirit entity which had been responsible for noisy rappings in their household. Over the course of the next few days, a code was developed whereby raps could signify yes or no in response to a question, or be used to indicate a letter of the alphabet. The publicity this aroused and the numerous investigations carried out at the

time allowed mediumship to come out into the open, and many home circles sprang up for the purpose of further communication.

In a short space of time many societies of Spiritualists were formed in America, based not merely upon the psychic phenomena produced but also upon the religious implications that lay behind the teachings received from spirit.

The two daughters, Maggie and Kate, were both purported to have mediumistic powers. By November 1849, they were giving public performances of their skills, encouraged by their older sister, Leah, and the Spiritualist movement was born. The mania to communicate with the dead swept the country and the Fox sisters became famous.

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Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930)



Arthur Conan Doyle was an early supporter of Spiritualism in the UK and attended lectures on the subject from 1881. In 1893 he joined the British Society for Psychical Research along with

other eminent men of the time, such as Prime Minister Arthur Balfour. Conan Doyle was part of a team to investigate mysterious occurrences

at Colonel Elmore's home in Dorset. The occupants could hear chains being dragged across a floor and moaning sounds. The results at the time were inconclusive, but when a child's body was later discovered buried in the garden Conan Doyle stated he was sure that the phenomena had been caused by the spirit of the dead child.

In 1917 Conan Doyle gave his first public lecture on Spiritualism and became an outspoken advocate for the movement, writing books and articles, and making many more public appearances to promote his beliefs.



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Helen Duncan (1897–1956)



Helen Duncan was a Scottish housewife forced to serve time in London's notorious Victorian Holloway women's prison for holding séances. Her skill lay in mediumship of a particular kind:

she was able to act as a vehicle for physical phenomena whilst in trance state. By the 1930s and 1940s she was traveling the length of wartime Britain giving regular séances in hundreds of Spiritualist churches and home circles.

The reported evidence that flowed from these physical phenomena séances was remarkable. 'Dead' loved ones apparently appeared in physical form, spoke to and touched their earthly relatives.

One such sitting was attended by a man named Vincent Woodcock, who had brought his sister-in-law for an evening's demonstration.

Vincent later gave evidence in London's Old Bailey Court that Helen Duncan had slipped into trance and began producing 'ectoplasm'. Then his dead wife materialized from this ectoplasmic matter and asked both Vincent and his sister-in-law to stand up.

The materialized spirit then removed her wedding ring and placed it on her sister's wedding finger, adding, 'It is my wish that this takes place for the sake of my little girl.'

A year later the couple were married and returned for a further séance during which the dead woman appeared once more to give her renewed blessings to the happy couple. Many other such testimonials were collected for her trial but she was still sent to jail.

Ivy Northage (1909–2002)



Ivy Northage was well known for her teaching abilities. She set up the Ivy Northage School of Mediums in Britain, as well as working at Spiritualist churches, the Spiritualist Association of Great

Britain and the College of Psychic Studies, helping many students to hone their mediumistic skills. Her students were not allowed to get away with vague communication and she would insist on genuine proof of survival, encouraging mediums-

in-training to persevere until the recipient could accept the message.

Ivy was a clairvoyant and, in her earlier days, demonstrated transfiguration, where the features of spirit people were built up over the medium's face in a way that would be recognizable to their loved ones on Earth. Her spirit guide, known as Chan, delivered many lectures through her mediumship, some of which were recorded.

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Leslie Flint (1911–1994)



Leslie Flint worked as a medium for over 60 years. As his mediumship developed, he began working as an independent direct voice medium. This faculty allowed people from the spirit world to communicate in a 'living voice' of their own – totally independent of Flint himself. When taking part in séances with Flint, participants would report hearing the voices of the dead surrounding them in the room.

From 1953 onward, hundreds of these direct voice encounters were recorded, creating a library of over 2,000 audio recordings.

Albert Best (1917–1996)



In 1925, when just seven years old, Albert Best recalled having his first spiritual experience, which entailed a

full materialization of a discarnate Spirit. Albert began to attend the Belfast Spiritualist Alliance Church and it was not long before they recognized the spiritual gifts in Albert that needed to be nurtured. He was invited to sit in circle for development soon after.

Albert fought in the Second World War, during which he was taken prisoner of war and shot twice – once in the mouth and once in his left hand, which left it paralysed. After being released from the prison camp, he returned to Belfast to hear that his wife, Rose, and three children had been killed in a German air raid on Belfast in 1941.

In 1944 he settled in Ayrshire, Scotland, and started to work for the Post Office. He began to sit again in development circle, and by 1951 started to attend

the world-famous Spiritualist Church in Kilmarnock. It was not long before he began to be known further afield. Albert developed an uncanny ability to utilize his experience in the Post Office. He would not only give names, but addresses and telephone numbers of people in spirit he connected with. He had a fascinating ability to recover information about past lives and events. Albert's healing ability was legendary and is still talked about today.

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In the early 1950s, Albert became acquainted with the editor of *Psychic News*, Maurice Barbanell. This was a strong friendship that led Albert to work with spirit in a variety of places throughout the UK and the rest of the world.

On a visit to India in 1991, he had an audience with Rajiv Gandhi (Prime Minister of India). Albert told him to stay out of crowds as he was in great peril. A few weeks later, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a suicide bomber who emerged from a crowd. He also assisted with the location of victims' bodies from the Moors Murders. He is revered as one of the most important Spiritualist mediums of the 20th century.