

THE MALLABURN CIRCLE

The Mallaburn Circle by Maurice Barbanell

Now the scene changes to a small village near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, to another home circle and to a séance, one which lasted five hours. During that time seven spirit forms, three male and four female, materialised. There were also eight spirit communications in the direct voice, six from males and two from females, each different and with individual characteristics.

The medium was Mrs. Gladys Mallaburn, of whom I had heard such splendid testimonies that I sought an invitation to one of her séances. The results exceeded my expectations. They would defy materialistic explanations by any honest sceptic.

The dexterity with which the illuminated trumpet used for voice communications zoomed at great speed around the room without fumbling or hitting anybody was evidence of unerring accuracy by the spirit operators. Yet frequently it was suspended in mid-air when communicators spoke through it.

The only sound that came from the medium was at the beginning. We heard her stertorous breathing, a preliminary presumably to her going into trance.

One of the first to materialise was John, the medium's husband. He had become a regular spirit visitor since his passing, a few months earlier, when he appeared at one of his wife's séances before his body had been located. John, a chief officer, met his earthly end when he tried to rescue an engineer who was drowning.

At this séance he went to his teenage daughter, Rosemary, and expressed regret for the act of abortive rescue that led to his premature passing. 'If only I hadn't taken that risk,' he said. Once again I was impressed with the naturalness with which Rosemary accepted her father's spirit return.

At this séance there was profuse evidence of identity from communicators. One of the first to speak was a man who said, 'Death is the greatest adventure of my life!' He gave his name as Flight-Sergeant Navigator Leslie Hodgson. This war victim 'killed' in combat, addressed his mother, then living in the same village. He described how his spirit body left the airplane before it crashed to the ground.

As proof of his nearness, he told his mother details of happenings with which she was involved during the past few days, all of which she confirmed.

What I wish to stress is that Hodgson's was clearly a masculine voice.

The medium's spirit controls proved they were 'old hands' by the expert way they manipulated the trumpet, speaking through it and later materialising.

They also showed a splendid understanding of séance conditions when they 'raised the vibrations' with humour and repartee to enable the best psychic results to be obtained.

This was especially noticeable with Violet, a young Negro girl, whose features were clearly visible when later she materialized - all three feet of her! She had the score of sitters in laughter with her delightful 'scrambled' English and her childish but nevertheless evidential observations. She demonstrated supernormal powers by accurately describing my London home in detail though, of course, the medium had never visited it. This was the first time that Gladys Mallaburn and I had met.

One spirit communicator was Billy Curran, the son of two well-known Yorkshire Spiritualists who frequently attended the circle. What struck me was the seeming normality of the conversation between the 'dead' boy and his parents.

Here, once again, was a demonstration of the simple but vital fact that love can be stronger than death.

I was pleasantly surprised when the trumpet moved towards me and I was welcomed by the spirit voice of a communicator giving his name as Tom Best.

I had known him as an outstanding Spiritualist personality in the North of England. Like some of the best evidence, which cannot be printed, he furnished information concerning domestic details which were known to me.

Tom was in splendid form, especially with one comment, 'Elliott gave me a good funeral!' This referred to the Spiritualist minister who had conducted his funeral service. Best quipped, 'I didn't know I was half as good!'

Then it was the turn of another spirit control, a former local miner, who spoke in the 'Geordie' dialect and whose idiom would be appreciated only by natives. I noticed at this stage how the temperature suddenly dropped, a familiar happening at this type of seance, as if a heater had been switched off.

Another curious phenomenon was the occasional scent of perfume. Violet said that she was responsible for producing it. There was no doubt about its reality, for she smothered all the sitters with the perfume. One drop got into

my eye and made it smart.

Among the figures to materialise was my old friend, Helen Duncan, who greeted me enthusiastically. She had been a famous materialisation medium whose séances I attended at least thirty times. When she spoke her voice was characteristic. Once again I have to state that her message to me, though evidential, was of a private nature and cannot be printed.

Then came the climax, the materialisation of the Arabian guide who is in charge of all the phenomena. Using an illuminated plaque, on which there was his portrait, he showed himself in turn to each sitter. His dark-skinned features were clearly visible. His undoubtedly male voice came in loud tones, but with a foreign accent. He went to the improvised cabinet, a curtained-off recess, and brought the entranced medium in front of it so that we could clearly see the two of them side by side.

I had evidence of the 'solidity' of one materialisation, a woman, who firmly gripped my chin. Her hand was warm, solid and normally constructed. I noticed her delicate fingers. There was nothing ghostly about them.

I observed that the materializations - one was a former archdeacon - varied in height, build and size. Violet showed herself in party dress because of the approach of Christmas. Her ectoplasmic robing was clearly discernible, as was that of the Arabian guide.

While the direct voice part of the séance was held in darkness, for the materialisations a shaded red light was used. Though, throughout the seance, Violet had joked, she ended on a serious note. 'The sweetest song in all the world,' she said, 'is that **THERE IS NO DEATH.**' This was a refrain that I have heard countless times.

I managed to persuade Mrs. Mallaburn to come to London and give a séance for a group specially invited by me. As many were well-known Spiritualists, it was not surprising that the communicators included two former mediums and four people who had been keen exponents of psychic truths. Some of these communicators, seemingly because they knew the ropes, introduced subtle references as evidence of identity.

Originally I had intended this to be a small circle, but the number grew until there were more than a score present. An improvised cabinet was arranged and an attempt made to black out light from the windows and door, but even so there were faint streaks visible during the whole séance.

The conditions were not ideal for the type of psychic phenomena produced

by this medium because it was a day of unexpected sunshine, though late in September. Frequently during the proceedings the medium's chief guide explained that the ectoplasm was almost melting. Yet such was the efficacy of the spirit operators that the séance lasted four hours, with one of the most spectacular results coming right at the end.

Mostly the communications came through a trumpet, but several spoke in the independent direct voice. The variety of these voices was outstanding. The movements of the trumpet were fascinating to watch and were in themselves evidence of supernormal activity. Never once did it fumble or bump into any sitter as we watched its gyrations, made visible by the coating of luminous paint.

Each communicator revealed individual characteristics. The first to speak was the medium's chief guide who welcomed us from within the cabinet. He was an individual of dignified mien, obviously a highly evolved entity who was doing his utmost to demonstrate the reality of the spirit world in which he now lived. I thought that his parable on life here and hereafter was very impressive.

Violet, the young Negro girl, was in complete contrast with her pert humour, her mispronunciations and her sallies.

Next, through the trumpet, we heard a male voice giving the name 'Hitchcock, Percy'.

The séance was being held in a room of the headquarters of the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain, an organisation of which he had been its president. With a short message urging his hearers to continue the work to which he had dedicated his earthly life for so many years, he seized the chance of addressing some of his colleagues in the room.

Now we heard the words: 'Austin – Herald - reporter.' I knew who it was at once, for I had heard him communicate before. This was many years earlier at an Estelle Roberts voice séance when Air Chief Marshal Lord Dowding was present.

A. B. Austin was a *Daily Herald* war correspondent who was killed in Italy. When he communicated, Dowding immediately recalled him, saying, 'He was on my staff at Fighter Command and he was a fine officer.'

This time I thought Austin returned because I had invited to be present a journalist who worked in the same building as he had and who was attached to a companion publication. Austin mentioned, 'I have Cat's Eye with me.' This was another reference to an Estelle Roberts voice séance at which 'Cat's-Eye'

Stevens, one of the famous Battle of Britain fighter pilots, had returned and spoken to his wife.

Plaintively I heard Austin ask, 'Oh, God, why do they always have to kill?' There was silence and then followed: 'I'm still alive and kicking. They can't keep a good man down, and I'm still reporting.' He sent greetings to Lord Dowding, his old Chief, and to Lady Dowding. His final words were, 'The pen is mightier than the sword.'

He was followed by a woman whose voice was clearly audible through the trumpet which moved to Sydney Richardson, a splendid spiritual healer. 'My husband Syd,' she said. Then clearly I heard the sound of a kiss coming through the trumpet.

Her next words showed that no sex jealousy continues beyond the grave, for she sent 'my love to Ursula'. This is Sydney's second wife, Ursula Roberts. 'She is so good,' said the spirit speaker to her husband, 'and you have much to be thankful for.' There was a cryptic message, 'The wheels do go round,' which Sydney understood. Then came: 'It is so nice to hear your voice. Thank you for all the happiness we had. Tell Ursula I have brought her mother.'

Helen Duncan communicated again to me. I knew it was she the moment I heard the voice say, 'Nellie', followed by a mention of her husband's nickname. Hers was a long, sustained, fluent communication. She referred feelingly to her last séance, broken up by police, followed by her passing a few weeks later. 'I was black and blue all over,' she said.

There was a reference to the unjust sentence she served in prison when she was convicted during the war, under the now repealed Witchcraft Act, a scandal which so enraged Spiritualists that it led to our campaign which brought us legal and religious freedom. 'Those mailbags!' she said, referring to her prison work.

Nellie spoke sympathetically of the companion who, because she had accompanied her, had also been sent to prison as an accessory, and the dreadful time this woman had in gaol. 'I was one of the lucky ones,' said Nellie. 'They feared I was dying, so they put me into hospital.'

Then her mood altered as she laughingly exclaimed, 'Fancy, I'm an angel now!'

Again came a change of mood as she earnestly exhorted us to guard mediums, our most priceless possessions, and promised to help Gladys Mallaburn in her labours.

Once again the trumpet moved from the ground and was suspended in mid-

air as a voice declaimed: 'When I go down to the grave, I can say like many others, "I have finished my day's work"; but I cannot say, "I have finished my life." My day's work will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes on the twilight; it opens on the dawn.'

'That is a quotation from Victor Hugo,' I said. 'It was frequently recited by an old friend of mine.' The voice replied, giving the name of this old friend, 'Walter Oaten'. Deliberately he had mentioned only his second Christian name, one that I had never heard this editorial predecessor of mine use in my presence. So that there should be no doubt of his identity, he added, 'Ernest.'

After revealing by his words an intimate knowledge of matters in the *Two Worlds* office, he said, 'Amy is all right.' This I was glad to learn, for it was some time since I had heard from his wife. 'I'm sorry I had to leave her in the eventide of life,' he said. 'I'll make it up to her when we meet.'

'This is true,' he said, adding, 'I haven't my stick now.' His old friends will recall the stick he used because of his limp. Ernest ended his communication with the plea, 'Don't overwork your mediums.'

Violet provided a welcome relief from the heat by drenching sitters with perfume which smelled like the flower of her name. She announced that she was going to bring some flowers. Soon we were strewn with flowers which later proved to be chrysanthemums.

A deep masculine voice announced itself: 'John Mallaburn, late of - ' naming his house and the village where it stood. This, of course, was the medium's husband, who was by now a regular communicator. John sent his love to 'my favourite blonde', his 13-year-old daughter, who always sits in the home circle.

There was a homely touch as he asked his entranced wife to be told later that, though their dog was fretting at home, he was keeping an eye on their beloved animal.

He announced that he was bringing some apports, a score of sea-shells later taken away by sitters as souvenirs. Through other mediums I have had many apports. This word, derived from the French *apporter* ('to bring'), refers to gifts brought supernaturally at séances.

A completely different voice came next, one which spoke in soft, modulated accents, and said its owner had served in the R.A.F. He made a beeline for my wife, who was close to the cabinet, allowing her to feel his materialised

hand, covered with ectoplasm, which frequently billowed from the cabinet over her.

His contribution was the recitation, seemingly impromptu, of a long poem on Survival.

He was responsible for an ingenious communication. 'The Hawk is here,' he said, which Ralph Rossiter, the Spiritualist Association's secretary, understood, even before the communicator added, 'Black Hawk. . . his name is Powell. . . This is my beloved son...'

Ralph, of course, will never forget old Evan Powell, that wonderful physical medium, whose guide, Black Hawk, was responsible for virtually saving his life when it seemed that he was condemned to suffer from tuberculosis. The phrase, 'My beloved son,' was one that Evan always used in referring to him. I could not follow, until Ralph explained it later to me, Powell's statement, 'I have met Holmes.' Evan was a great friend of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

After one of their many sittings, Doyle announced he was killing off Sherlock Holmes - public clamour later prevented this slaying - to devote the rest of his days to espousing Spiritualism. Jokingly Powell often said, 'I was responsible for murdering Holmes.'

Once again I heard the spirit control with his 'Geordie' dialect that you could have almost cut with a knife. I had to ask some of the regular circle members - six of them were present - to interpret what he said. His voice was high-pitched and he was always in character.

Another regular visitor followed, May, a Cockney flower seller, so proud of her hair that she went all round the circle trailing it over the sitters.

Finally the chief guide said he would try the experiment of an infra-red photograph being taken, but he could not promise success because of the heat.

Some of us were asked to leave our seats, unlink hands and to stand or kneel in front of the cabinet. We could hear his deep voice urging the medium to stand up. Icy cold breezes came from the cabinet, with constant billowing of ectoplasm. He gave the signal for the photograph to be taken. Alas, it was not a success, for all it revealed was a large rectangle of ectoplasm above which is part of a draped face.

Nevertheless this guide provided a striking demonstration by coming out of the cabinet.

There he stood, dressed from head to foot in snow-white ectoplasm, illumined by a soft light which flickered, he said, in tune with the medium's heart-beat.

This, he explained, was his 'soul light'. He did not venture far from the cabinet, but some of those closest to him were able to make out his dusky features.

Even this did not conclude the séance, as some thought, for Violet made a final appearance, saying we could not close until we sang her favourite song, in which she joined. I found it an impressive séance, interspersed as it was with evidence of a private nature.

Gladys Mallaburn at the end of four hours was a limp figure.

The next day, however, she was as right as rain.

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