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Spirits and Friends Beyond (The Seas): Spiritualism and the Creation of Universalism During the First World War and Its Aftermath

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Abstract

This article commences by noting that most accounts of Spiritualism during World War One and its aftermath consider that it was harnessed to assist either with the war effort, or to provide comfort for those on the Home Front who were grieving for the dead or missing. However, as this article uncovers and elaborates, there was a brand of Spiritualism which looked beyond this nationalism to provide a form of universalism which sought to heal the wound of both current and past conflicts, instead to provide a world of harmony in the post war world. The population of England was to be reunited culturally with its dead through a rewriting of the history of the Reformation, informed by Spiritualist contact with the Tudor World and individuals within it. By looking at the wartime and immediately post wartime careers of three individuals (Edward Bligh Bond, William Packenham-Walsh and Margaret Murray) the article demonstrates the work of this area of Spiritualism to suggest collective approaches to reconciliation and the writing of past historical wrongs. These individuals also provide evidence of a commitment to creating a shared psychological, anthropological and cultural heritage that would bring Europeans together to transcend the rationalist nightmare created during the war years.

Keywords: Spiritualism; national renewal; World War One; universalism

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1. Introduction

This article argues that much historiography of First World War Spiritualism in England has over emphasised its patriotic impact upon individual nations engaged in the conflict. Such historiography has investigated encouragement to those on the battlefield when under stress, and the comfort offered to those on the home front after bereavement or loss. This emphasis comes from studying the higher profile figures in Spiritualist writing, publishing and lecturing. Individuals such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Oliver Lodge and others inevitably draw readers into the world of national mission and bereavement, alongside the substantial failure of conventional religion to provide comfort for an emotionally and psychologically needy population. As such, focus upon national mission has served to limit consideration of Spiritualism within the wider history of ideas about pan-European identity and renewal after the conflict.

Through the consideration of three individuals: an architect/archaeologist (Frederick Bligh Bond), a clergyman/playwright (Rev William Packenham-Walsh) and an Egyptologist/historian (Margaret Murray) and their related work in the last years of the war (and beyond), this article uncovers the existence of a strand of universalism which sought reconciliation amongst nations. This sprang outwards from Spiritualism and drew upon

the logic offered by some academic disciplines. This universalism had bold ambitions to right historic wrongs, both at home and abroad, and to cement a united European future transcending past quarrels and to end the possibility of future conflict.

Historians of Spiritualism during the First World War have seen it as an episode in the overarching history of the phenomena, or instead have placed it in very specific national contexts—although sometimes historians have done both. A leading example of this follows the narrative created in the early months of the war around the 'Angel of Mons' incident. This described an angelic English army which had descended from heaven at the crucial moment to assist the BEF in its fight against the oncoming Germans. The writer Arthur Machen would later admit to inventing the story (Winter 1995, p. 67; see also R. Clarke 2012, pp. 216–22; D. Clarke 2005). Yet, this narrative became common currency both in the trenches and at home acquiring a life of its own, as accounts claimed it had a fundamental basis in fact.[1] Roger Clarke juxtaposed this famous story with a later German narrative about a haunted and supposedly damned type UBIII U boat (the U65). This enables Clarke to see World War One as a turning point marking the passing of a more bucolic approach to Spiritualism. Clarke sees the War as initially nurturing spiritualist experiences which were '... nostalgia for a lost world, or perhaps one that was about to be shattered' (R. Clarke 2012, p. 20). By the end of the conflict the horrors produced by war saw Spiritualism now embedded within modernism, in the shape of malevolent technology such as a haunted submarine. To Clarke, the Great War had made mainstream, 'a relationship between the supernatural and technology, which previously had been seen only in theatre and stage shows' (ibid., p. 231). Jay Winter, prefers to see the reach for Spiritualism during the war as fundamentally unmodern, instead believing it to be a Victorian hangover reflecting 'Continuity not transformation; reiteration not alteration' (see Winter 1995, p. 54). Thus, Spiritualism during World War One has been characterised as either forward or backward looking and seeking impact solely upon the nation in which it can be found—inspiring soldiers or fortifying their families against suffering.

2. The Spiritualist Background

The First World War had made the populations of Europe think in some thoroughly unexpected ways. The popular culture of almost all the combatant nations suddenly became filled with spiritual and religious images which relied upon the emotional power of saints and other symbols. In England these had a distinct tendency to replicate a pre-modernism which was nostalgic and comforting. Yet, this pre-modernism also predated the Reformation which, during these years, was seen as an age which had forcibly detached humankind from its spiritual base.[2] The break also coincided with Anglicanism's isolation from a concern for the dead—something which perplexed the British population and many commentators in the early years of World War One.[3]

The First World War dramatically altered 20th-century British culture's attitude to death, sacrifice, and suffering (see Jalland 2010). For the first time on a significant scale death would no longer necessarily happen at home surrounded by loved ones, but it was as likely to occur now suddenly and alone in an unfamiliar, unhallowed land. Even after death, the funeral and interment practices of generations were suddenly broken; since the British Government had quickly decided to prevent the repatriation of the dead, sometimes with some quite extreme measures (see Crane 2013).

Early Spiritualism had induced fear and trepidation amidst an atmosphere characterised by the Victorian darkened room. The First World War gave it instead narratives of revelation, salvation and light. But what really catapulted Spiritualism into a mainstream popular movement in the last years of the war was the publication of Oliver Lodge's *Raymond*, in which he wrote of spiritual communication with his dead son who had been

a serving officer.[4] Although the literature of the period states Spiritualism had been of various vintages, there were sections of it that had an appeal after World War One which was fundamentally new.[5] Such appeal became manifest because Spiritualism began to look forward for deeper resolution of present and even past problems for all nations, not just for those seeking to triumph.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle emerged to become a central figure in Spiritualism's wartime presence.[6] He cited the war years as 'widening his interest sharpening his thinking since it had become . . .of immense practical importance.' (Conan Doyle 1926, pp. 224, 226). His quest was described in quasi-spiritualist manifestoes *The New Revelation* (1918) and *The Vital Message* (1919)—something he referred to as 'The Search' (Conan Doyle 1918, 1919, chap. 1). Reaching out to the population at large was also considerably aided by the Northcliffe Press bankrolling Spiritualism to the tune of some £20,000 (McCabe 1920, p. 232).

Conan Doyle's first successful séance involved contact with the spirit of a sixteen-year-old Australian woman called 'Dorothy Poslethwaite'. This was the start of Conan Doyle creating a narrative of the afterlife as devoid of pain and suffering, with the spirit world anxious enough to reach out to the living. To the outside observer this was reassuring, but also indicated there was a life after death in a heaven that had put an end to petty religious squabbles. This ecumenical hereafter cast conventional Christianity in a poor light and potentially illuminated Spiritualism as a preferential alternative (Conan Doyle 1918, pp. 31–32).

Conan Doyle also communicated that the spirits beyond were delighted by their ability to contact those left on earth (ibid., pp. 135–36). Although it had shrewdly stressed its compatibility with mainstream Christianity, the arrival of Spiritualism as a legitimate form of competition showed how the central message of Christianity had been subverted by the sacrifices of the First World War.[7] Looking ahead was a clear part of Spiritualism's late war appeal and it offered hope to conduct human events in a civilised manner after the catastrophe that had befallen Europe. Yet, Spiritualism's appeal reached beyond anything that Christianity could muster, since it could consciously target the comfort and reassurance it offered to the specific individual. It spoke of individual relationships and the small details of domestic arrangements—restoring to completeness those that had been torn asunder by war and sacrifice. This showed that Spiritualism argued it was based upon human experience and emotion, rather than either hard, or abstract, reason or remote and irrelevant theology.

Thus, the status of Conan Doyle, Lodge, and others such as Rosa Stuart and Fielding-Ould as representative of mainstream Spiritualism's purpose and identity in England during the First World War, is to see it shaped to bolster the war effort. This was achieved through maintaining morale by suggesting spirits were actively aiding the allies, and by offering both comfort and occasional specific guidance to the cause of victory (see Stuart 1917; Fielding-Ould 1919). But there were other very different narratives around what Spiritualism's wider vision could do for *all* nations, and it is to this we now turn.

3. Frederick Bligh Bond and Events at Glastonbury

In the years after 1917, Spiritualism, importantly, did go beyond the welfare of individuals. Occasionally, it embraced a sense of national and international mission to provide means by which countries and their spiritual heritage might be renewed for a generation brutalised by war. This sense of mission would rapidly make individuals instruments of remarkable developments and bizarre claims. One of these people was Frederick Bligh Bond.

Bligh Bond was the bookish and relatively talented son of the Master of Marlborough School, who had just reached middle age when the First World War broke out. Bond's unhappy adolescence brought him under the spell of Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of*

Nature, a popular Victorian spiritualist work popular on both sides of the Atlantic. One of its central messages, that had a profound impact upon Bligh Bond, was that spirits instinctively return to the location they felt most affection for. Such an idea fed a lingering Victorian sense of sentimentality, but through Bligh Bond and others it was to have a somewhat different impact at the end of the Twentieth Century's second decade.[8]

By the end of the Edwardian period Bligh Bond had established a reputation as an ecclesiastical architect and an authority on mediaeval rood screens. The latter of these interests demonstrated a delight in the spirituality of this period which seemed long gone, yet alluring. Chance handed him a great windfall. The Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society appointed him its Director of Excavations, at the time that the Church of England was able to purchase the site of Glastonbury Abbey. This iconic site was now brought back into the spiritual fold after it had been torn asunder by the Dissolution.

Frederick Bligh Bond became convinced that he had uncovered the guiding principle that governed the design and structure of most mediaeval architecture. This consisted of a complimentary arrangement of squares and rectangles that produced a standard design, something which would also display elements of other significant shapes when complete. Bligh Bond also claimed such a design self-consciously reflected elements contained in the number systems of more ancient civilisations, akin to an emphasis in the thinking of our third individual—Margaret Murray. Bligh Bond's work at Glastonbury led him, in 1916, to submit his ideas to the *Journal of the Royal Institution of British Architects*. This seemed to outsiders to be the source of Bligh Bond's growing obsession with the supposed true and proper length of Glastonbury Abbey—an ecclesiastical building currently structurally too short to justify his theories. Bligh Bond also became prone to absent-minded digging on the site, apparently provoked by quite flimsy historical or circumstantial evidence. Instead, it seemed to some that it was perhaps driven by nothing more than whimsy.[9]

Most, at the time, linked such behaviour to Bligh Bond's eccentricities, or even gave him the benefit of the doubt. It was only later when writers noted that Bond's acquisition of responsibility for excavations at Glastonbury in 1907 had coincided fortuitously with his burgeoning other 'interests'. For ten years, Bligh Bond continued with his excavations, painstakingly writing them up each year. But he had elected to keep secret the inspiration and guidance behind his choice of sites in which to dig. The time was not right between 1907 and 1917, but the mainstream acceptance of the spiritualist challenge to conventional religion and morality opened a window of opportunity for Bligh Bond. His ideas forged what he believed to be a new area of psychology, which would aid archaeology and the culture of reconstruction—something merging past, present, and future. He argued that his 'experiments' had uncovered that the consciousness of the individual was a wholly indivisible part of a much wider collective consciousness. Recognising this would be the opportunity to encounter ancient and forgotten memories created by others and somehow donate them to this wider consciousness—what he termed the 'Great Memoria'. From here, a wider and deeper universalist understanding of things only glimpsed would eventually become crystal clear. The key to unlocking these was Bligh Bond's developed machinery of automatism (or automatic writing), which explains why he was convinced of the scientific credentials of his methods and his findings.

From a comparative silence about his findings, matters altered rapidly. In February of 1918, Frederick Bligh Bond published a series of quite startling revelations in a book entitled *The Gate of Remembrance*. This uncannily titled book was to resonate with the world in which it appeared. Its various editions displayed a line drawing of an arched pre-modern gate through which the light of supposed revelation shone out, consciously and insistently beckoning the reader to walk through. The word 'Remembrance' was especially

highlighted in eye-catching hollowed out text. The book was a considerable success going through two editions in 1918, a third in 1920, and a fourth in 1921.

Had this book been published in 1912, it might have sunk without trace, lost in a mixture of criticism and incredulity. But by 1918, the atmosphere had changed and what Bligh Bond had to say had a startlingly new relevance and poignancy. He commenced it with a clarion call (unduly invested with capital letters) offering comfort and salvation to the battered world of mid-1918. This was not present in the first edition and suggests Bligh Bond anxiously writing himself, and his discoveries, into the zeitgeist of a beleaguered country, especially when he was able to reflect upon the impact of the first edition:

> Still small Voices from a distant Time!—thrilling through the void and stirring faint resonances within the deeps of our own being—the great Telepathy, the true Communion of Mind, the gate of the Knowledge, the Gnosis of the apostle, whose key is Mental Sympathy,. . . No discord can mar this communion, since love and understanding are its law. Death cannot touch it: rather is he Keeper of the Gate. Time, as we know it, here counts for naught, for to the deeper dream-consciousness, a day may be as a thousand years, and a period of trance or sleeping as one tick of the clock.[10]

The book argued that it had long been thought that Glastonbury would '. . .be renewed as a centre of spiritual realisation and reconciliation between the various racial elements in these islands and their distinctive religious expressions, not yet co-ordinated' (ibid., p. 20). His apparent 'intuition' about where to dig had been guided through automatic writing by spirits from 'the other side'. These had given clues that developed throughout Bligh Bond's tenure at Glastonbury. They took the form of dialogues that emerged in various forms of English, and a number of automatically dictated diagrams that gradually unveiled the magnitude of the site and the plethora of important discoveries that awaited there. It seemed also so fortunate that these voices from beyond had lighted upon Frederick Bligh Bond, a man who self-consciously believed himself utterly in tune with the pre-modern period and its sensibilities.

Chief among those guiding Bligh Bond from beyond the grave was a small group of monks.[11] The pre-eminent figure in these communications was a personality which combined the spiritual and endearingly benevolent qualities of a monk, stonemason, and nature lover who had died in the 1530s. This individual was named in the automatic writings as Johannes Bryant who frequently spoke directly to Bligh Bond or had others speak on his behalf. This dual source of communication proved useful, particularly since it gave Bligh Bond an external picture of Bryant that completed his own beliefs about the life beyond. Bryant was painted as a somewhat happy go lucky monk, one who was more at home with nature than in performing his duties and the Holy Office.

This was not the piety that Bligh Bond might have craved, but the 'narrator' of Bryant's life confirmed how devotedly attached this fallible monk had been to the Abbey and its surroundings—enough to continue wandering and glorying in its majesty way after death. It was also Bryant's delight and pride in this religious house that drove his revelations to the delighted Bligh Bond. Bryant and his accomplices became known to Bligh Bond as 'The Company of Watchers', and led him to discover the long-lost Edgar Chapel, a celebrated and almost fabled building which had previously been joined to the choir of the Abbey's main structure. By the time *The Gate of Remembrance* reached its third edition, Bryant and the 'Watchers' had provided further evidence which enabled Bligh Bond to uncover the Loretto Chapel which had been attached to the north side of the Abbey. Both chapels dated from the very end of the fifteenth century and within the apparent lifetime of Johannes Bryant. This still further fed the image of affection linked to place and its apparent influence on the post death experience.[12]

Yet, apparent evil threatened this mediaeval idyll in the shape of Henry VIII, a tyrant who appears as a villain laughing at Johannes Bryant's unfortunate accident in spilling a barrel of beer. There followed a discussion as to whether this incident had been responsible for the Abbey being a victim of the Dissolution, before the narrator interjected that it was Henry's innate greed which had proved its downfall. Such a fate would have ensured the destruction of the two chapels that Johannes Bryant had loved. Reckless unfeeling interlopers inspired by greed and selfishness had intervened in what had been an idealised pre-modernism, despoiling the building and executing the abbot, the latter an act Bligh Bond saw as 'barbarous'. We shall meet this somewhat caricatured, almost pantomime villain, King Henry in another guise.

Bligh Bond certainly knew when his moment had come, and the events in Europe over the previous four years had painstakingly provided that moment. Confidence in orthodox rationality had inflicted death and injury leaving millions behind seeking succour, hope, and a new series of beliefs that would also revive the old. *The Gate of Remembrance* and Bligh Bond's other subsequent revelations provided just such a salve. The book's message tapped into ideas, aspirations and feelings that the British public would have found uplifting and comforting in the dark days of early 1918. It appealed significantly to the pre-modernism that had haunted the British mind at crucial points during the first days of the war. Unwittingly, Bligh Bond had taken such thinking a stage further. Automatism had directed his hand in order that he discover the full grandeur of England's most important spiritual building with universalist appeal, one that had been 'a trust for all Christendom'.[13] This had been graciously given to him by the products of past memory held in a vast psychological storehouse.

Though revelations had been occurring for over ten years, publication of them at this auspicious moment was intended to be an act of renewal. These conscious memories had directed Bligh Bond to provide evidence about Christianity's allegedly first arrival on English soil. It was also fabled as the only site in England where uniquely English Christian worship had endured successive invasions (Wright 1915, pp. 6–7). Human knowledge of it was to be complete again—reaffirming the covenant Christianity had once made with England. When the well-known Arthurian connection was added, this potent mixture was clearly capable of speaking to many observers on many related levels. Bligh Bond's obsession with Glastonbury had spoken more widely to England and beyond to wider Christendom. The site of his excavations was sacred and, at this trying moment, Bligh Bond had made it more sacred still.

The book was widely and enthusiastically reviewed by some, yet criticised by others for its rash assumptions, its methods and the apparent implications for human knowledge. Some falsely equated the book's premise with more widely known mainstream Spiritualism. To some the claims were fraudulent and the spirit writings were forcibly made to cover over conventional archaeological methods (see Wilkins 1923). Others were concerned about the implications of Bligh Bond's findings about how academic disciplines might have their discoveries somehow guided by collective consciousness, as well as the idea that all were connected together within such a consciousness. This last idea was scarcely popular in some circles more concerned with fighting an attritional war for survival.

But Bligh Bond, and his critics, were not in control of how his diverse readership encountered and used his ideas. Viewed from this perspective it becomes abundantly clear that he had, wittingly or unwittingly, added still more potent ingredients that might provoke other reactions amongst his popular readership. The 'Company of Watchers' was a remarkably comforting title and concept. These long dead individuals, bound by sympathy and sentiment to a specific location, lingered just 'on the other side' of human consciousness and contact—at least until their presence was evident amongst the fortunate.

These 'Watchers' were, for the most part, monks and the spiritually awakened—so they at least could not be mistaken for the horrendous and trickster demons that Christian opponents of Spiritualism so readily invoked. Indeed, they fortuitously represented the safe marriage of Christianity with the essence of Spiritualism. Bligh Bond's own American publisher Ralph Adams Cram saw the wider potential of what his author had discovered. Presumably, in response to some reactions to *The Gate of Remembrance*, Cram contacted Bligh Bond to declare that he had written to *The Times* to publicise 'a plea for the rebuilding of Glastonbury, as a spiritual and religious memorial to the British dead in the war.'[14]

This sentiment appears to have been given further justification and spiritual impetus by the alleged discovery in 1920 of the bones of Joseph of Arimathea—the concrete link between the Grail, the last supper, and the legend of Christianity's transplant from its very source to England. This discovery, claimed by William Kerrich was later uncovered as a fraud. However, it is especially interesting to note that Kerrich chose his moment which encapsulated the hopes and aspirations of those looking forward from the war to a radiant future gilded by the sanction and approval of God and the Christian past. He was not the only one and by 1922 the Vicar of Glastonbury was also championing the Joseph of Arimathea connection and the unbroken tradition of English worship for all he was worth (Lewis 1922, pp. 13–14, 24). He was even prepared to claim that there was substantial evidence that St. Paul had preached in Britain, although he seemed less convinced that St. Peter had also done so (ibid., pp. 10, 17).

By fixing hopes and longing upon the sacred site of Glastonbury, with its numerous resonances through myth and history, the mourning parent, sibling or spouse could ingest this idea of eternal sentimental attachment to place. This meant it was not so great a leap of imagination to envisage their loved ones drawn home from the battlefields where they had fallen. The missing would also be made real again, all destined to be comforting and benign 'watchers' around the living in their everyday life. When readers linked this to the idea of indissoluble collective consciousness, then this made the strongest argument possible that the dead, all dead, were incapable of leaving the side of the living. This arguably went one better than the Spiritualism of Conan Doyle and Lodge by suggesting that their experiences remained a part of collective consciousness still enjoyed by the living. Yet, it was also tantalising, holding out the prospect that the experiences of the dead were already there to be shared, invoked, recited, and in another sense 'experienced'. Moreover, the apparently scientific justification for what Bligh Bond was suggesting conceivably made these ideas rather more acceptable than aspects of other contemporary Spiritualism. This, arguably, fell between two stools and Tim Hopkinson-Ball has suggested that they required a relaxation of approaches and idioms to make them wholly plausible. They were capable of 'alienating the religious by appearing too 'scientific', and the scientific by appearing too 'religious'' (Hopkinson-Ball 2007, p. 117).

This was precisely a facet of thinking during these years that would frequently break down the walls of conventional and institutional ideas, especially in the face of what appeared to be clear and unstinting necessity that placed emotion in a hierarchy above logic and utility. This foregrounding of emotion was a potentially populist riposte to the assumptions of the solemn, faceless, official stance of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.[15] This organisation sought generic solutions to the momentous task of remembering the war dead and missing in significantly large numbers (Crane 2013). Inevitably, its solutions pleased the government and those who could accept its position and the problems that it faced. Whilst its policy denied repatriation, the *quid pro quo* the Commission offered was to state that the fallen's place was alongside their comrades, in the midst of the lands they had died defending. The populist sentimental attachment to home, nurtured by Bligh

Bond, argued differently, and could yet move outward and forward to embrace other European nations and other future moments in time.

Frederick Bligh Bond conceivably overreached himself with his subsequent publication. In 1919, he sought further credibility for his scientific method by publishing his 'other automatic writings' in a book entitled *The Hill of Vision*. This work, amongst other things, claimed to have predicted the war, elements of incidents that occurred during its duration, and thereafter promoted a hopeful vision of prosperous and successful peace. This never proved as popular, or nearly as comforting, as *The Gate of Remembrance*, but it did display other elements and ideas that were to enter popular post war consciousness.

From prophesies of war this work engaged upon a direct discussion of the final stages of the conflict. Within these descriptions we can see the language of populist revolt and suspicion alongside a popular universalism. Germany is described as belatedly reacting against a 'hitherto impenetrable screen of falsehood and intriguing diplomacy.' Whilst popular sentiment was predicted to demonstrate that 'Nature, and natural forces, drive humanity against the will of its diplomatists into a covenant for mutual preservation and protection' (Bond 1919, pp. 56–57). Older and flawed ways of thinking such as the 'survival of the fittest' would be effectively nullified by the 'Era of Spirit', something ensuring that 'the old conditions are ending' (ibid., p. 72). For the attitudes that were to come after the war this work was extremely suggestive. Some automatic writing scripts in the book elaborated upon the concept of the biblical chosen race. Unlike previous populist attempts to harness this for nationalistic purposes, these emphasised that the ancestral blood of these original tribes was scattered throughout the nations and races of the earth so that all were 'heirs to the promise' (ibid., p. 101). Ideas of collective consciousness re-emerged once again in the suggestion that 'each unit of a race is a microcosm of the whole' and the scattering of the twelve tribes might be seen as a metaphor for this collective consciousness, working silently for the unity of mankind. Bligh Bond argued that the scattering of the tribes was a benign act of God intended to spread the seeds of the 'Christ Consciousness' in each land and people (ibid., p. 107).

Although this script degenerates into inward looking and self-justifying esotericism, it does demonstrate how much Frederick Bligh Bond could tune himself into the zeitgeist. For our purposes the interest lies in how far Bligh Bond had picked up on the post-war need to display how the races of Europe were linked. Whilst philologists would choose languages as their battle ground and folklorists would explore ethnographic material, Bligh Bond worked with what he knew and provided his own slant on this movement. The scattering of seeds throughout the world dovetailed well with concepts of a collective consciousness. This idea, from the *Gate of Remembrance*, originally offered contact with the lost. In new hands seeking rejuvenation and renewal collective consciousness, linking with a scattered spiritual ancestry offered the chance for the empowered to greet each other, literally and in all senses, as brothers and sisters.

4. William Packenham-Walsh and the Repentance of Henry VIII

Spiritualism under Bligh Bond claimed to offer hope for the future and was also bold enough to right the wrongs of the past. Whilst undertaking missionary work in the Far East, the Rev William Packenham-Walsh chose 1919 as the year to indulge his growing fascination with the life and fate of Queen Anne Boleyn.[16] Upon returning to England, he visited her grave at the Tower of London and, somewhat histrionically, spoke to his inner self, willing that the dead Queen would now become his guardian angel. Thereafter, Packenham-Walsh outlined a considerable series of happy accidents and coincidences that he invested with portentous meaning and importance. He accidentally ran into the vicar of Hever, near Anne Boleyn's home, when a few minutes later he would be on the other side

of the parish. He unbeknownst to himself preached in a parish where a local parishioner had written a play outlining the life of Packenham-Walsh's heroine. He then persuaded himself to write his own dramatic account of her life and met with the author of the other play at the old vicarage in Eastbourne, where a chance discovery revealed an unknown portrait of Anne Boleyn. He was then informed that a poorly constructed German film of Anne Boleyn's life was in circulation, therefore justifying his own attempt to produce a true and sympathetic history of his heroine (Packenham-Walsh 1963, pp. 1–5). From here, the dead queen cast an immense shadow over William Packenham-Walsh, guiding his thoughts and actions for what would prove to be over forty years.

At first sight this is a catalogue of quite strange and, at least, eccentric behaviour followed up with an exaggerated and deeper sense of coincidence. It suggests someone in the throws of some kind of desperation. We may even suspect that the simple chronology of some of these facts and occurrences may have been 'misremembered' or 'mistranscribed' to create coincidence and significance, as some accused Frederick Bligh Bond of doing. However, it becomes of greater interest and awakens rather more empathy when considered in the context of its times.

After centuries of distrust the dead were suddenly a part of Anglicanism in a way that they had never been before. It was only as late as 1900 that it had become permissible for Anglican congregations to say prayers for the dead as a result of war, but the practice was not at all widespread (Byrne 2010, pp. 126, 129, 200–1). Thus, those who had died only became especially important in Anglican thought during the course of the following decade. Where the Catholic world had been used to their presence in various ways, Anglicans lived with a kind of supremely 'pent-up' demand for what the dead could be, do, or say.[17] This demand became still more important with the rapid and momentous loss of life that was consequence a of World War One.

William Packenham-Walsh's obsession inevitably, given the period, led to an introduction to a psychic medium who undertook a sitting with him in August 1921. At this first sitting Packenham-Walsh was confronted with the spirit presence of the Duke of Norfolk who stepped aside to allow his daughter Anne Boleyn to make contact with the clergyman. After a series of trial questions asked by Packenham Walsh, he gradually, over a significant number of sittings, accepted he was in the presence of the once executed queen and stated himself prepared to undertake her bidding. Queen Anne admired Packenham-Walsh's obsession with her and the veracity of his dramatic depiction of her. After this, he was led to a number of discoveries about her life and times, revealed to gain the unflinching confidence of Packenham-Walsh, a man who the queen now increasingly referred to as her 'champion'.

Gradually, through word of mouth, an increasing number of mediums and psychics become involved in assisting this spirit communication. As this story unfolded over the next six years, Packenham-Walsh was gradually introduced to a further host of Tudor characters, who all spontaneously joined the assembled company at séances to make contact with the living. These included siblings of Anne Boleyn and an increasingly erudite, lucid and determined Katherine of Aragon. These dialogues with the spirits of long dead Tudor queens were supposedly historically revealing, but it soon became clear that their attempts to contact Packenham-Walsh had an even more important agenda.

In December 1922 Packenham-Walsh received a letter from Eleanor Kelly, a psychic he had met briefly. In it she enclosed a dictated psychic 'script', which had mentioned Packenham-Walsh and none other than Frederick Bligh Bond. This implored action to help '. . . one who on earth oppressed his fellows and made havoc of the lives associated with his own. Now at long last the spark of Love Divine glows dimly in the ashes of his soul' (ibid., p. 45) The script terminated with the soubriquet 'One of the Band', a nomenclature

relatively familiar to Frederick Bligh Bond. Soon after, Eleanor Kelly indicated that she had been contacted by the spirits of an Anglo-Saxon man, named Alwyn, and that of a young Tudor woman named Lois. The latter had simultaneous lambasted and offered sympathy for the spirit of King Henry VIII, who had been trying to make contact. This was because, in the words of Lois:

> Little of Kingly quality was there in his tarnished and tawdry mind, much alas of evil and self-will and cruelty and pride, much of vice and wickedness. But now after so long sloth is the spark beginning to glow in his heart and Alwyn, beautiful and good has taken charge of this his soul to lead him step by step upon the path of repentance and reparation. (ibid., p. 52)

In the message Lois begged for the valiant workers on earth to bring about this 'conversion' and thereby restore peace to a deeply troubled soul. The intimations from Lois also suggested that this work might profitably purge evil from the world. By now, Frederick Bligh Bond was also himself utterly intrigued and it was agreed that a meeting between himself, Packenham-Walsh and the medium Eleanor Kelly should pursue this matter further and deeper. When such a meeting duly took place, Packenham-Walsh's date with history became filled with a greater personal poignancy with the participation in the 'work' by his deceased daughter Helen who, having died at the age of nine, was portrayed as now having reached a contented adolescence.

Another individual who became involved in this enterprise at this time was the notable Irish Spiritualist medium Hester Dowden. Her acquaintanceship with Bligh Bond and Packenham Walsh coincided with her notoriety as a result of her publication *Voices From the Void*. This she had followed up with an account of her spirit communications with Oscar Wilde and after this with William Shakespeare. Given these credentials, it is scarcely surprising that Hester Dowden's involvement suddenly increased the stakes. Perhaps all considered her expertise and 'gifts' would transform the enterprise. Unsurprisingly, Hester Dowden's spirit guide, Johannes, interceded with Katherine of Aragon who was relieved to declare Hester's gifts led her to declare that 'Now I feel great strength and I think there is real help here. . .. You seem to me to have found a right person. Ask her to help you' (ibid., p. 63). The spirit of Katherine persuaded them to hastily relocate to a nearby garden in Chelsea that had been in use in Tudor times. The procession must have looked faintly odd, stood or seated in the garden asking questions into the void of a dark London night. But suddenly from the pencil of Hester Dowden, the words 'HENRY REX' appeared on the paper. From the conversation that followed it was manifestly clear that King Henry VIII was a melancholy, disturbed, and deeply unhappy spirit, denied the 'light' that shone upon the others that Packenham-Walsh and his compatriots had contacted. He had been absent from the 'missionary work' with the unbaptised that had occupied Anne Boleyn and Katherine of Aragon in the beyond. Instead, he had been 'asleep' in a state that Packenham-Walsh likened to purgatory.

The conversation then moved to persuading Henry of the great 'harm' that he had perpetrated on many individuals. Henry turned on his questioners to assert that he '. . . only executed the rights of a King'. Evidently the spirit of Henry did not like being questioned and controlled by Packenham-Walsh and he lashed out calling him '. . . a varlet some knave from a tavern who is making sport of me because I lie at your mercy' (ibid., p. 65). This seems to have indicated that within this world view the living were capable of coercing and controlling the dead—something that must have held out infinite promise for those with both the will and need to do so. When asked to consider his actions towards Anne Boleyn, the Henry figure relented and recalled fond occasions with her in life. Packenham-Walsh then seized his chance and outlined to the dead king that Anne was the means to his salvation, through his acknowledgement of his poor treatment of her. At this juncture,

Henry agreed to go and pray, which the assembled company all hailed as a species of victory. This séance closed with Katherine of Aragon making a further appearance to intimate that she herself was also now involved in the King's absolution, enabling transfer from the 'dark place' to which judgement had confined him.

At a subsequent séance, Henry was confronted with the events of his marriage to Anne. He was made to face the fact that his actions had involved ruining her engagement to Lord Henry Percy, followed by the King's tiring of her—an act culminating in him marrying again immediately after Anne's execution. Henry's reply was that only a part of him felt remorse, a statement which prompted an appeal to the better part of his nature. The Henry spirit softened from this point, so that Packenham-Walsh declared at the end 'How different was this to his attitude at Chelsea where a king could do no wrong, and where his wives had only got what they deserved' (ibid., p. 91).

This effort at reconciling the King to accept the guilt from all those that he had wronged eventually resulted in a tableau witnessed by Packenham Walsh and the others. This included Henry's six wives (him having forgiven Jane Seymour for an unaccountable slight) alongside others including Anne Boleyn's confidant Mary Wyatt, Archbishops Wolsey and Cranmer, as well as Sir Henry Norris, Sir Thomas Boleyn, and Sir Thomas More. What Henry thereafter declared, standing amidst this throng of the great and the good of Tudor scheming and conflict, was a clarion call to all who had been responsible for the deaths of others:

> 'Tis my punishment—l accept it—to see these ghosts out of my past, but as I grow stronger in the knowledge and understanding of the Love of God, in the Light of Whose Countenance we dwell, I shall learn my lesson and strive to win back other souls who have erred in like manner as myself.' (ibid., p. 159)

The outline of this series of events seems quite incredible to read at over a century's distance. How, and why, did individuals genuinely believe they were seeing what they were seeing? How did they similarly believe they could intercede with this historic pageant of dead Tudor individuals, enabling them to rewrite the wrongs of three hundred years ago? One answer is to note just how mainstream such beliefs and motivations were during this period from the very end of the War and into the proceeding decade. Whether this series of spirit communications was borne out by the facts is less important than the clear fact that people rushed to believe this was true. Crucially, they did not regard what they were doing as unusual or inadvisable. Certainly Packenham-Walsh and Bligh Bond, throughout all of their texts, sought to provide proofs when verifying coincidences, or 'truths', that could not have been known by themselves or others. Likewise, they both did the same when concluding their description of a séance with a particular medium—both anxious to indicate these spiritual helpers could not have known vital details about them as individuals, or the dead historical figures that appeared to all present. Importantly, this was to avoid accusations of fraud rather than to refute suspicions that they would be exposed to the ridicule of others.

What emerges from encountering these people is their honest earnestness and the quest for some changed state of mind and enlightenment, something that had shaken them from the unpleasant earthbound realities of turbulent and catastrophic years. Could they thus have, out of this darkness, by chance stumbled upon the genuine power to right wrongs, and to rewrite and atone for the mistakes of history? Would they thus be reassured that long remembered enmities would dissolve in the serenity of the life beyond? This was so different an outlook to the universe, than the mounting suffering that the all too real world of Total War had condemned their generation and that of their sons and daughters. In this context they conceivably had a right to try and make the most of this opportunity—whatever its 'real' source was.

But there are wider things this episode tells us about the England of 1917 to 1925. Firstly, it suggests that the dead were a more discursive commodity than we had perhaps realised. As we discovered their appearance as a topic of discussion addressed a considerable 'pent-up' demand amongst the religious. But there are also things about William Packenham-Walsh that emerge from reading his exploits. He desperately wanted this divine connection to happen, and all his notation of each supposed 'coincidence' indicated this. Seemingly, spirits from beyond the grave were also happy and competent to direct this to a successful conclusion. This was, importantly, *always* an intelligent, considered and benevolent plan, one with the welfare of all humankind both on earth and elsewhere foremost. Those who had lived through the war had clearly seen enough of the unintelligent, ill-considered, and malevolent plans produced by supposed rationality and the rational. The effect of these had been devastating.

We also underestimate, in the twenty first century, the impact of the comforting nature of the communications from the other world. Anne Boleyn at one point suggested to Packenham-Walsh that she had come to bring renewal to the contemporary world through her actions, in conjunction with those she had contacted. There seems no doubt that Packenham-Walsh and the assembled company would have wanted to hear this message and would have felt their efforts rewarded. Likewise, despite the pantomime element of Henry VIII's character which was brought to the fore for corroborative effect, the atmosphere all these Tudor personalities conveyed was a kind of post-human calmness and serenity.

Beyond the grave, on the other side, bizarre events were unravelling distant history as the world then knew it. Queen Katherine of Aragon, perhaps unsurprisingly, declared herself to be Henry's 'true' wife and thus was prepared to lead him to repentance and redemption. But the assembled crowd may not have been prepared for the reconciliation between Katherine and Anne Boleyn, who everyone realised must have despised one another in life. A weeping King Henry was eventually restored to the company of his sons. Queen Elizabeth I was led into a close relationship with her mother. In short all attained a lasting peace beyond conflict and the disagreements and enmities of this life, perhaps (without intending a shred of irony) living happily ever after.

Even the compulsorily irascible Henry had his poor temper, mood swings, and intransigence transformed for the better by these communications, and the timely absolution of Packenham-Walsh. Moreover, whatever the source, the personality of King Henry seemed reasonably believable. He manifested all the haughty, bombastic and over assertive traits that generations had been schooled in. Henry's gradual repentance increased his confidence and loquaciousness, asking from beyond the grave whether the wrongs he had done could be righted by a record of his penitence. He even believed that a conversation with a contemporary Tudor 'playwright' had encouraged him to commission on earth a play which would present a pantheon of England's leading historical characters. These would be made, through the apparent force of this drama to '. . .act as would seem best to them for the good of England.' (ibid., p. 158) Spitefulness even produced a somewhat telling message for those present concerning the unnecessary carnage the generation of 1918 had unleashed on the world:

> 'Foul we may have been in my day, and myself the worst sinner of my reign, but how much better are those now who gloat over the excesses, the sensualities and drunken orgies of a bygone day. Methinks thy boasted civilisation hath no cause to vaunt itself, who didst still send forth thy sons to the slaughter, to a greater bloodshed than ever stained the annals of my reign. In all these years since Henry reigned, hast thou still to love thy neighbour as thyself.' (ibid., p. 158)

5. Margaret Murray and the Witchcult as Universalism

One other area of knowledge that was altered in these years in the name of universalism was the study of one branch of history. We can view this through the work of one individual, inspired by the spiritualist milieu, into creating a unified and pacific post-war world. In doing so, the truth of history was sidelined to produce a universalist, but deeply flawed, history of witchcraft in Europe. The person responsible for this was Margaret Alice Murray, a woman inspired by the possibilities that beckoned from how societies and nations could rethink their past, to look forward to a benign universal future.

Murray had been born in India and, upon returning to England, had entered into the comparatively new discipline of Egyptology. The first university department in Britain specialising in the subject only arrived on the scene in 1893, to be led by the distinguished scholar Flinders Petrie with whom Margaret Murray struck up a friendship and intellectual relationship which lasted many years. Their lives of scholarship in Egypt were rudely interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1914. Within a year, Margaret Murray had entered voluntary war service and found herself in France in charge of organising the regular supply of linen to an embattled field hospital. Murray was now in her early fifties and the supervisory responsibility took its toll on her health, and in 1915, she was removed from her post and advised to rest (Sheppard 2013, p. 98).

Returning to England, something drew her to Glastonbury as a place at which to convalesce. Quickly, she fell under the spell of everything strange and esoteric that was happening there during these years, and amongst those who were involved both living and dead. Murray was in Glastonbury the same time as Frederick Bligh Bond but there appears no evidence that she shared the source that inspired his scholarship. Whilst automatic writing and spirit contact might not have attracted Murray, she did share a sense of mission that made opinion and conviction shine brighter than hard facts, and she would later become a by word for poor scholarship. Murray eventually produced an idealised vision of mankind, at a time when such things were actively refuted by the actions of millions and thus destroyed wholesale. Murray also questioned the brutality and authoritarianism of pre-modern Christianity, which had produced needless cultural division. Such criticism led her to seek the restoration of a universalist pagan identity to modern Europe.

Murray's interaction with the world of mysticism in Glastonbury became symbiotic with her scholarship. Delving into all that was known about the Holy Grail legend, Murray became convinced of a close intersection with her Egyptology. Through some leaps of imagination, she became convinced that the stories of Joseph of Arimathea and the transplantation of Christianity into England had occurred via Egypt. Thus, the development of English civilisation and its Christian component was an assimilation of ancient Egyptian culture—something that Margaret Murray in many senses had brought home with her to England (ibid., pp. 162–66).

This belief in English culture's origin was part of a wider movement in archaeology termed the 'diffusion theory'. This essentially believed that all cultures developed through the 'diffusion' of all processes and tools of civilisation from more advanced cultures to more primitive ones. Some, those who became known as 'hyperdiffusionists', were prepared to identify Egypt as possessing the unique combination of political, social, structural and environmental advantages that permitted it to spread its cultural legacy throughout the world. By 1923, the anthropologist William Perry in his *Children of the Sun* argued that Egyptian culture had been the blueprint for the entire world's civilisations (ibid., pp. 179–89).

As some noticed this idea undermined the previously commonplace cultural supremacy of Europeans. When the multiple implications of these theories were yoked together, they were yet another blow to the old world and its assumptions. Greece was

no longer the cradle of the modern, but this was instead Egypt, a less well known and less explored country. Restating such ideas reinforced anthropologists' desire to show the common cultural origin of Europeans, at a time when re-uniting the previously destructive nations of Europe appeared to be a priority of civilisation. Moreover, it tried to bump start European society into a search for a new heritage, one which would be discovered together and shared for mutual benefit in a world constructed anew. This academic interest in Egypt and its cultural artefacts also become a populist obsession, as people became engrossed in the enjoyment of Egypt inspired ornaments, furnishings, and consumables. This took flight after Lord Caernavon's discovery of the tomb of the Egyptian king Tutankhamun in 1922. Margaret Murray was clearly attracted to the idea of Egypt being a central core of civilisation, but one element she shared with the hyperdiffusionists about commonality of heritage was to lead her in a very different direction.

Murray's interest in the pagan and Christian past continued after she returned to London. Although not trained as a historian, her instincts and the milieu in which she was caught up led her to construct the twentieth century's first attempt to write a history of witchcraft. Murray's lack of training, her obvious lack of professionalism in the use of historical evidence, when combined with her own driving conviction, have led to this work being substantially discredited. Nonetheless, her approach and the outcomes from it also serve to demonstrate some of the imperatives of the times. Murray's lack of historical knowledge was replaced by her cannibalising what knowledge she had and turning it to what she believed was a good effect. She also stepped out of conventional disciplinary barriers to simply follow her intuition. In this she hoped that she was furthering a cause of unity and its further dissemination—even into the dark and perhaps undistinguished episodes of the more distant past. The end manifestly justified the means, whatever the collateral damage to scholarship and her own academic reputation.

Margaret Murray's submergence in folkloric study produced *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*. This, like diffusionism, produced an overarching argument about how the history of witchcraft had unfolded in Europe and America. Murray claimed to have discovered significant evidence that those accused of witchcraft were not simply innocents persecuted by society, but had been targeted by Christianity directly as ideological opponents. The introduction to her *Witch-Cult* book meanders around and contains a number of glaring and frankly odd contradictions. Some of these can only potentially be explained by Murray's interest in producing a pan-European common heritage that imbibed equally the pagan and the Christian wider heritage. Sometimes this resembles a checklist of all the flotsam and jetsam of European belief and folklore.

Murray noted that witchcraft had been '. . . a cult practised by many classes of the community, chiefly, however, by the more ignorant or those in the less thickly inhabited parts of the country.' From this she deduced that it '. . . appears to be the ancient religion of Western Europe. The god. . . was worshipped in well-defined rites; the organisation was highly developed.' (Murray 1921, p. 12) Such deductions were linked to the surviving tales of fairies and elves who '. . . once inhabited Northern and Western Europe' and had been driven 'to the margins of Europe by successive invasions and colonisation by incomers.' Those driven out had been progressively identified with conceptions of evil instilled by fear, yet paradoxically, they had influenced Christian belief and sacred rites (ibid., p. 15). Witchcraft beliefs were equally capable of delivering an uplifting spiritual experience and similarly inspiring the joyful martyrdom which Christian commentators noted. To a witch 'Sabbath was to her the true paradise, where there was more pleasure than she could express.' Such individuals also '. . . went to the gibbet and the stake, glorifying their god. . . with a firm belief that death was but the entrance to an eternal life in which they would never be parted from him.' (ibid., pp. 15–16) Murray also regularly reiterated the

homogeneity of the evidence of witch beliefs and worship left behind in many and varied localities and circumstances.

This elaborate theory involved accomplishing considerable leaps of imagination from Murray and her readers. Perhaps the hardest to go along with was the unquestioning acceptance that the words, acts and deeds that witches confessed to in witch trials during the period (at least those around their actual rites of worship) were in fact real. The rational argument of the unwarranted targeting of the old, infirm, and marginal was replaced with ideas that stressed that witchcraft accusation addressed actual and coherent practices. Margaret Murray claimed that those accused of witchcraft were survivors of a pre-Christian fertility cult which had been grudgingly permitted to survive by Christianity, until the latter entered a specifically militant phase in the fifteenth century. Tolerance turned into persecution as Christianity organised counter measures and created sophisticated machinery of investigation, recording and punishing those it found transgressing its supposedly newfound quest for orthodoxy. Prosecutions began slowly—even by Murrays' own calculation—and she was able to trawl up one English case each century until the famous case of Alice Kyteler in 1324 (ibid., pp. 21–23).

Drawn by 'diffusionist' logic, and the spirit of wishful thinking amongst the well-intentioned intelligentsia, Margaret Murray claimed that Europe's witches were united in a shared culture of pantheistic nature worship and reverence for fertility. Witches were organised into a pan-European cult that had this complete similarity, wherever it might be found throughout Europe. Murray drew up a blueprint, which included the uniform organisation of covens, with an unswerving regulation size and a rigid formula for their activities. In this, she followed a model which saw the transfer of culture as something instinctive and automatic which, in her thoughts, perhaps turned Europeans into recipients of culture rather than its progenitors.

Rapidly, however, it was history that was to prove a victim of Margaret Murray's work. Many contemporaries questioned her methods at the time of publication and her account of the sabbat as the ceremonies of a series of closely linked fertility cults began to fall apart. It rapidly became obvious that Murray's selection of material had been careful and had systematically avoided contact with anything that threw her thesis into question. From the witch trials, large sections of evidence which might have questioned the sanity of those in the dock were ignored. What Murray anxiously portrayed as compelling evidence of pan European fertility cults was carefully cherry picked out from around a tirade of contrary evidence. Plausible fertility rituals occurred alongside fantastical episodes of prolonged flight through the air over considerable and incredible distances. As a complete package such evidence brought critics back down to earth with a bump, as they reached again for explanations that foregrounded pressure, insanity, delusion, and coercion.

For our purposes, the shortcomings of Margaret Murray's wilful approach to historical sources is of less importance than its wider purpose in her pursuit of post-world war universalism. The push for ideas around diffusion and the missionary urge to showcase ideas of common European heritage verged almost upon desperation for some. This sort of good intention could easily be infectious, and this was to prove significant when we consider what happened next to Margaret Murray's ideas about witchcraft and fertility cults. Very quickly, her ideas were scoffed at by the academic establishment, but this was a far cry from the reception she received from the public. Her ideas and her publications rapidly gained a considerable following, and she received many compliments for her 'scholarly' accomplishments from the public at large. Indeed, her stock was sufficiently high for her to be asked to produce the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entry on witchcraft, an occurrence blamed for retarding the integrity of witchcraft history for more than a generation (Sheppard 2013, pp. 169–70).

Murray's stance was a good fit with the post-war populist urge to see unity amongst European peoples. It was also populist because it spoke of the witches as an organised organic well-spring of innocent folk belief. Moreover, they were emphatically representative of the masses of the unlettered who were conspired against by an educated and instrumental elite intent on tyrannical control and regulation. Undoubtedly, this message also rang bells in the interwar generation sceptical of the so-called benevolent rationalism of their elders and betters. Witchcraft under Murray emerged as a popular movement that had the capacity to infuriate and confound the academic and wider establishment not simply in the 1920s and 30s, but also deep in the early modern past. This interpretation was also reassuring about the witches themselves whose identity was transformed. They henceforth became simple folk healers and no longer the abominably disfigured crones and villains from the Grimms' fairy tales. They had now, according to this new historical interpretation, become representatives of a fertility cult at a time when a constructed nostalgia for the bucolic and its promises had become a component part of British culture. Murray's witches were more in keeping with Morris' artisans and Cecil Sharp's folk singers and dancers, than the mechanised world that had delivered the slaughter on the Western Front. When we put all these things together it now becomes a little more obvious why Murray was the choice to tell this history to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Her message clearly both entertained and pleased all except the awkward squad of scholars and researchers - those who quibbled about evidence and manuscripts. Elsewhere, those reading the *Encyclopaedia* merely wanted a so-called truth they could assimilate and perhaps even enjoy.

Indeed, the proof of affection for Murray's ideas was to bear lasting fruit in the eventual development of the modern Wiccan movement, which was substantially modelled on the witches that Margaret Murray had created from her distortion of historical facts. The strands of such thinking belatedly come together in popular culture's most enduring 1970s depiction of this—Robin Hardy's Frazer influenced horror film *The Wicker Man.* Murray herself was largely unmoved by the conviction that the war had induced a cultural effect on herself and all around her. In her autobiography published in 1964 she declared:

> Though war may be regarded as a terrifying and horrifying factor, destructive and hateful, it often has a stimulating effect on a nation, which had lapsed into a condition of sloth after long periods of peace. . .. War often sweeps away many old ideas and customs which are outworn and which clog and prevent advance. That alertness of mind so necessary in times of danger, lifts the whole nation forward on the path of civilization. (Murray 1963, p. 203)

6. Conclusions

This article has demonstrated that during the last years of the Great War, forms of Spiritualism in England (and its fellow travellers) very clearly did go beyond serving the needs of a combatant nation. It has examined the quest of some practitioners and seekers who reached for a form of universalism that sought to improve the world for all mankind, not simply the English nation. They went beyond nationalism to highlight the importance of writing the wrongs of the past. Edward Bligh Bond argued the dead of both sides had joined us in a great communion of thought, and that the loved ones lost on both sides of the conflict would be able to provide comfort to the living, never leaving their side again. Packenham-Walsh provided a tableau in which sworn enemies would be reconciled in the afterlife, whilst the wrongs of the past would be overturned. Margaret Murray distorted and mis-shaped history to persuade the war generation that all Europeans were anthropologically linked by common cultures, and were more alike than the discourses of previous generations would admit. Potentially, this comforted those who might have wanted to assuage some form of guilt, or those anxious to rewrite history beyond the

image of those who had made a mess of it. What all these different responses speak to is the feelings of impotent helplessness that must have gripped those, in various ways, left behind by those who surged to the front, were lost or did not return. Guilt must also have been a significant factor in many of these reactions. We can certainly imagine this of the middle-aged Bligh Bond, Packenham-Walsh, and Murray, as well as perhaps many others.

But there were also other interesting outcomes from the narratives these individuals created. Alongside Conan Doyle and Lodge, all three offered different scathing critiques of modern Christianity. Bligh Bond saw Christianity's lack-lustre nature transformed by re-awakening the potential of the primitive church. This also reached back beyond the Reformation to once more unite all Europeans with their dead. This same theme can be seen in Packenham-Walsh's interplay with those responsible for the Reformation in England. Henry's own actions in 'creating' Protestantism had isolated him, somewhat ironically, in a Protestant style purgatory. He was to be redeemed by the actions of the Protestant heroine, Anne Boleyn, who was now working with the Catholic Katherine of Aragon to answer and address the needs of the dead. The subtext was about the shelving of religious differences for a greater good, conceivably seeking to mirror the end of other conflicts. What was unique here was the casting of a Protestant figure as responsible for the reconciliation between faiths. The narratives of both Bligh Bond and Packenham-Walsh argued the Reformation dispersal of the dead away from the living was to be set aside. Margaret Murray focussed upon the authoritarian nature of Christianity during a moment in its history when it suppressed a gentle and bucolic paganism—one that had been so ubiquitous that it had united Europeans.

The collective effect of all of this was to make the Britain and Europe of the immediate First World War period capable of assuaging its grief. It was also expected to examine its responsibilities in the face of the rhetorical accusations of this world and the next.

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Notes

1. Interestingly, Conan Doyle denied Machen's claim to have invented the story, offering the testimony of Harold Begbie and Ralph Shirley. He also noted a related story from a British officer, fighting at Le Cateau in August 1914, who communicated his sightings of squadrons of horsemen to the 14 September 1915 edition of the *London Evening News*. See Conan Doyle (1926, pp. 242–43). See also Stuart (1917). Stuart also notes similar stories emerged later from Loos and other places a year later. She also notes the French army created their own counterpart in claiming to see the Maid of Orleans. This vision she suggested had been noted by British troops who thought it '. . . augurs well for the cause of the Allies that the Maid of Orleans, who once fought against the British, should now appear fighting on their side'. pp. 59–77.
2. (ibid., p. 63). Winter quotes both Viscount Halifax and J.N. Figgis as suggesting that Spiritualism had flourished because the church had turned people away and failed to give them an optimistic message that Spiritualism instead had done. Much of this was caused by Anglican distaste for the concept of prayers for the dead. Figgis noted that angels (such as those appearing at Mons) were often more widely acceptable than direct communication with the dead. Similarly the Dean of Manchester, William Shuckburgh Swayne at the 1919 Church Congress argued the Church had failed to address human needs during the Great War. See Byrne (2010, p. 155).
3. See Nash (2013, chap. 5). Interestingly Roger Clarke suggests an English belief in ghosts was the manifestation of a 'sublimated Catholicism.' (R. Clarke 2012, pp. 20, 120).
4. Oliver Lodge (1851–1940) had acquired a distinguished reputation in Britain as a physicist. Upon his conversion to Spiritualism he sought to reconcile the spiritualist and material worlds in a single system. The First World War brought him to mainstream prominence—significantly as a bereaved father who benefitted from spiritual revelations from beyond. See similar examples in Stillwell Taylor (1918, pp. 10, 18) and Tudor-Pole (1966). See also Blum (2007, p. 295). This notes that Lodge had been interested in Spritualism since 1907. Thus, the publication of *Raymond* was the culmination of a search and a rejuvenation of Spiritualism packaged for specific circumstances.

[5] See Ruckbie (2018) for examples of Spiritualism taking many forms just before and during the war. There is amongst these a common thread of foreboding that contrasts distinctly with the post-war manifestations.
[6] See Conan Doyle (1918, p. 54). Alongside Lodge's work Conan Doyle also cites the work of Hill (1917), Crawford (1916), Barrett (1917), and Balfour (1917). See also Winter (1995, pp. 58, 60).
[7] See R. Clarke (2012, p. 203). Clarke notes Spritualism's progressive anti-Christian tendencies.
[8] One source of biographical and some original material on Frederick Bligh Bond is Kenaway (1965). This has been largely superseded by Hopkinson-Ball (2007).
[9] Interestingly, Bligh-Bond was not unique since the occult scholar M R James, in 1902, excavated Bury St Edmunds Abbey to find the long lost graves of several of the Abbots (R. Clarke 2012, p. 124).
[10] Bond (1918). Preface to 2nd edition May 1918.
[11] Roger Clarke suggests this was a motif which constituted an undercurrent in English belief in ghosts, so that 'monks returned to their lost homes after death' (R. Clarke 2012, p. 291).
[12] For a slightly sympathetic view of Bligh-Bond's ideas see Hookham (1918). At one point Hookham declares 'It is attractive, this world memory idea.' p. 24.
[13] Bond (1918). Preface to 2nd edition. p. 3.
[14] R Cram to F.B. Bond 26 September 1919. Quoted in Hopkinson-Ball (2007, pp. 121–22).
[15] Byrne (2010, p. 226). Byrne argues the CWC wanted its overseas cemeteries to resemble English country churchyards.
[16] Roger Clarke noted that Anne Boleyn was a particularly popular ghost who allegedly haunted a number of places (R. Clarke 2012, p. 173). But he also noticed that she had an elevated status within Protestantism and that, as a result, Catholics were keen to see her 'walk the earth' as a punishment. p. 293.
[17] (ibid., pp. 132–33). Byrne argues that memorial sermons between 1850 and 1900 contained surprisingly little mention of the afterlife. Meanwhile, many of them were designed to create a sense of foreboding about death.

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