

Biography of J. Arthur Findlay (1883-1964)

Founder of the Glasgow Society for Psychical Research and of The International Institute for Psychical Research, J. Arthur Findlay was an early convert to Spiritualism and is remembered today primarily as the founder of the Arthur Findlay College for Spiritualists and as the author of 10 books dealing with his research and experiences in the area of mediumship, religion, and psychical matters.

A native of Glasgow, Scotland, Findlay was employed in the shipping business as an accountant and later as a stockbroker in Glasgow, apparently a very successful one as he wrote and lectured extensively on finance and economics. He also served as a justice of the peace for the counties of Essex, England, and Ayrshire, Scotland. During World War I, he dedicated much of his time to the Red Cross and received the award of Order of the British Empire for his work with that organization.

Findlay's first experience with mediumship came during September 1918, when, while walking along a Glasgow street, he passed by a Spiritualist church and, out of curiosity, went in. A service was going on at the time and he observed and heard messages from the "dead" purportedly being passed on by a medium to members of a congregation. Findlay reacted with much skepticism and was invited by Duncan McPherson, a member of the group, to attend a séance the following day with John Sloan, a trance voice and direct voice medium; an invitation he accepted. After hearing dozens of voices speaking to different people through Sloan's direct voice mediumship, Findlay was mystified. Then, just as he was wondering why no voices came for him, his father, Robert Downie Findlay, gave his name and spoke through the trumpet. "The voice continued speaking and referred to something that only my father and I,

and one other man, ever knew about on earth, and that other man, like my father, was dead," Findlay explained. "I was therefore the only living person on earth with any knowledge of what the voice was talking about. ... All this was extraordinary enough, but imagine my surprise when my father concluded by saying: 'David Kidston is standing beside me and would also like to talk to you about this matter.' " ¹



Kidston, Findlay explained, was his father's partner in a shipping firm and had, 14 years earlier, objected to the senior Findlay taking on his son as a partner in the firm, because he did not believe there was enough business for another partner to share in. Kidston then began speaking and apologized for opposing Findlay's employment in the firm. "No spy system, however thorough it was, no fraud or impersonation by the medium or anyone else could be responsible for what I experienced," Findlay wrote. "I was up against something quite inexplicable." ²

Some years later, after McPherson had died, Findlay's brother, John Findlay, was attending a séance when McPherson communicated and told

John that he had taken Arthur to his first séance, at the Scottish Mediums' Union Church one Sunday evening. John told McPherson that he was wrong and that it was at Holland Street Spiritualist Church. McPherson corrected him and said it definitely was at the Scottish Mediums' Union Church and told him to confirm it with Arthur. "So my brother asked me the next time we met," Arthur Findlay reported. "He was wrong, and the voice claiming to be McPherson was right. It was at the Scottish Mediums' Union Church that we first met, so that telepathy, if telepathy can produce a voice, which it can't do, is not the explanation of how this happened."³

Another very evidential sitting involving John Findlay took place in 1919 when Arthur took him to Sloan's for a séance. A voice came through identifying himself as "Eric Saunders." The name rang no bell with John Findlay. Saunders told him that he had met him in the Army. Although John Findlay still could not place him, Saunders gave him the names of the duty station and their commanding officer, which were correct. By way of a test, John Findlay tried to cross him up by saying, "Oh yes, you were one of the Lewis gunners, were you not?" Saunders replied that they were then using the Hotchkiss guns, not the Lewis guns, which was correct. Saunders then recalled a humorous incident in which the colonel made them all run around the parade field with their guns, an incident which John Findlay clearly remembered. John Findlay asked Saunders what brought him to the séance and Saunders explained that Findlay had done him a kindness by obtaining special leave for him, something he had not forgotten. Findlay remembered obtaining special leave for someone under his command but still could not remember the name Eric Saunders. However, he contacted another member of the unit and verified that the man's name was indeed Eric Saunders.

Although Sloan was the medium he focused on, Findlay sat with a number of other mediums. Sitting with Mrs. Bertha Harris in Glasgow on February 9, 1936, he and his brother, John, heard from

their recently-deceased mother, receiving very evidential information, including information about a secret drawer in her bedroom containing papers of interest to them. After the sitting, they went to their mother's bedroom and found the drawer just as described.

"Slowly, but steadily, I came to understand that what I thought was impossible was really possible, what I thought could not occur did occur, that those I thought were dead were very much alive, that they had bodies of finer texture but similar in form to our own, and that the medium gave off a substance which enabled them to materialize their etheric mouths and throats and tongues and again vibrate our atmosphere," Arthur Findlay further wrote.⁴

After satisfying himself that he was communicating with discarnates, Findlay set out to contact more advanced spirits in hopes of learning something about other realms of existence. He was successful in communicating with advanced spirits, who explained much of their world to him, as much as he could comprehend. His book *An Investigation of Psychic Phenomena* (1924), was followed, among others, by *On the Edge of the Etheric* (1931) and *The Rock of Truth* (1933), *Where Two Worlds Meet* (1951) and *The Way of Life* (1954).

Findlay summed up his views in a letter to the editor of *The Times* on May 20, 1932, writing, in part:

"I believe that it is quite impossible to understand, or even to get a working hypothesis of the universe from a purely physical standpoint. Those who try to do so are attempting to explain the infinite by our limited sense organs, which is quite impossible.

"The material world is a transitory and passing world, and so also is the material universe, and matter, as we see it, is the least important thing in the universe, though to us to-day it seems to be the most important.

"Psychic science, however, is opening to us a new universe, a universe of etheric substance, governed by mind, and only when orthodox science

condescends to examine this new universe revealed to us through mediumship, can it possibly hope to get a true perspective of the universe as a whole.

“A physical, or material, explanation of the universe is impossible, because the physicist is looking at, and considering, only the physical universe, whereas the real universe is the etheric, and physical matter is but the result of a minute quantity of vibrations compared with those which constitute space, where the real universe exists.

“Space is the real universe. We think it is empty but it contains life and growth, a real objective world to its inhabitants.

“This I have learned after fifteen years of experimenting and studying of psychic science. What I have found, others, such as Crookes, Wallace, Lodge, Barrett, Flammarion, Richet, and Lombroso have likewise found. Orthodox science, however, will never be able to approach to a true explanation of the universe until it accepts the means nature has put before it, namely through mediumship,

Then it will learn things, now ignored and misunderstood, from intelligences in the etheric world who look on us as children groping for something we shall never find without their aid.

“Those of us who have had the privilege of being taught by intelligences greater than those of this earth find little interest in a physical explanation of the universe, because we have been taught to look on the universe as a gigantic scale of vibrations, or waves of motion, of which the physical represents only the equivalent of what an inch is to a mile. We are also taught that the realm of mind is the real universe, and that our individual minds are conditioned by the vibrations of our surroundings. As mind is indestructible, and never dies, our appreciation of the universe changes as mind responds to finer and finer vibration.”⁵

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¹ Findlay, Arthur, *On the Edge of the Etheric*, Rider & Co., London, 1932, p. 57

² Findlay, Arthur, *On the Edge of the Etheric*, Psychic News, London, 1986, p. 96

³ _____, p. 97

⁴ Findlay, 1932, p. 59

⁵ Findlay, Arthur, *The Rock of Truth*, Psychic Press, Ltd., London, 1986, pp. 231-232