

# PSYPIONEER

Founded by Leslie Price

Edited by Paul Gaunt

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## Highlights of this issue

Editorial changes.	173
Georgina Eagle.	174
Georgiana Eagle – Queen Victoria’s Clairvoyant Revealed. By Stephen Butt.	175
How to obtain previous issues of Psypioneer and to subscribe free.	196

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## EDITORIAL CHANGES

Due to circumstances involving his work, Leslie Price is at present unable to continue to act as editor of Psypioneer. It is unclear at this time if this is to be a permanent or temporary change.

Leslie has appointed me to continue as editor. However, due also to my own work commitments, I will be unable to give Psypioneer my full attention until the latter part of September.

It will be my intention to continue Psypioneer to the standard that its readers have been accustomed to under Leslie’s editorship. Incidentally, Leslie will still continue to contribute to Psypioneer.

I myself have previously worked on Psypioneer as assistant editor, and administration administrator. Contributing support to editorial material and the various articles as part of its continuing success with its growing independence and increasing number of subscribers.

Psypioneer has not been a success for its editorial material alone. It has been supported with the ever important input from its subscribers with their valuable articles and constructive feedback. I will be looking for this continued input from such avenues, which have and will be crucial to Psypioneer’s continuing success. So please send your contributions to me at [Psypioneer@aol.com](mailto:Psypioneer@aol.com)

I had initiated the idea of re-printing rare material in the newsletter, the first being presented in PP 12 April 2005. ‘A Report of the Mysterious Noises’ by E.E. Lewis1848.

Leslie has been arranging to continue this by re-printing *Lectures on Clairmativeness: or, Human Magnetism* by Rev. Gibson Smith. Explained by the celebrated Jackson Davis of Poughkeepsie. Printed in 1845.

I am presently working on this for the next edition; this will be followed by other rare out of print historical material.

I look forward to your continued support and contribution to enable the continuing progressive success of *Psypioneer*.

Paul J Gaunt, Editor.

### **GEORGIANA EAGLE**

Factual precedence is an important aspect in *Psypioneer's* electronic newsletter; bringing spiritualistic histories backed by referenced information. In PP 9., we saw the old well told stories of Hydesville, Katie and Margaret Fox and the mysterious communicating peddler were misrepresented and not in line with the original reports of the time.

Another well told story in spiritualist literature is that of Georgiana Eagle. Her relationship with Queen Victoria as a medium resulting in Georgiana being presented an inscribed watch in 1846.

In *When Dead Kings Speak* by Tony Ortzen 1985 published by Regency Press, on page 24 while remarking on Queen Victoria's psychic life he states: it is certain that soon after she became sovereign, Victoria presented a gold watch to the medium. The engraved inscription read, '*Presented by her majesty to Miss Georgiana Eagle for her meritorious clairvoyance produced at Osborne House, Isle of Wight, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1846.*'

Stephen Butt, has researched this story in depth showing that some of these well told stories are not always in line with the underlying facts, as will be seen in the above fairly familiar quote that frequents spiritualistic literature.

Stephen Butt has had his Georgiana Eagle research published in *News Stead. A Journal of History and Literature: The William T. Stead Memorial Society*. Printed in issue Number 22 Spring 2003. <http://www.newsstead.itgo.com>. Unfortunately, this journal ended at issue 25 in 2004. However back issues and interesting information on William T. Stead is still available on this site.

Stephen has now slightly updated his article having obtained further evidential references to Georgiana's last days. I would like to thank him for his valuable contribution in the input of this article.

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## **GEORGIANA EAGLE - QUEEN VICTORIA'S CLAIRVOYANT**

### **REVEALED**

**By Stephen Butt**

This is a story of illusion and delusion, of a vanishing act that never really took place, and a mystery still to be solved.

For many years, an embossed gold watch was displayed at the College of Psychic Studies<sup>1</sup> in London. It was claimed that the watch and the plaque on which it was mounted was proof that Queen Victoria was interested in spiritualism to the extent that she participated in séances and consulted mediums. The plaque's inscriptions also implied an association between the newspaper editor and social campaigner W.T.Stead and an unknown clairvoyant by the name of Miss Georgiana Eagle. The watch, rather irreverently known as 'Vicky's Ticker', remained on public display in London until it was stolen in 1963.

The story of the timepiece told of an unknown and undocumented female clairvoyant who, allegedly, once performed for Queen Victoria; a clairvoyant of whom nothing has been recorded except this one tantalising reference on the plaque to her 'meritorious and extraordinary clairvoyance'. If she existed at all, and if she did attend Queen Victoria, why has she remained unrecognised? Royal recognition was much sought after by the spiritualist movement in its early days, and several of the more prominent mediums succeeded in gaining the respect and sponsorship of a number of the crowned heads of Europe. Evidence that Queen Victoria had also taken part in spiritualist activities (and before such activities were widely popular) would have been of great value to the English spiritualist movement in its infancy.

The two inscriptions on the plaque, one on each side of the timepiece, read:

*'Presented by Her Majesty to Miss Georgiana Eagle for her Meritorious and Extraordinary Clairvoyance produced at Osborn House, Isle of Wight, July 15th, 1846'*

*'Presented by W. T. Stead to Mrs Etta Wriedt through whose mediumship Queen Victoria's direct voice was heard in London in July 1911.'*

Incorrect assumptions about these inscriptions and the provenance of the watch have led to rather confused and inaccurate research on the part of earlier writers. For example, it has been assumed that Georgiana Eagle was an experienced adult spiritualist medium when it is said she visited Osborne House. In fact, she was still a child. Further confused thinking has surrounded explanations offered for the incorrect spelling on the plaque of the Queen's residence, as the inscription omits the `e' in Osborne.

Another source of confusion lies in the common understanding of the term `clairvoyance' as a description of the activities of clairvoyants in England at that time. Clairvoyance before the rebirth of English spiritualism in the decade after 1850 involved, quite literally, `seeing with the eyes closed.' Normally, practitioners identified or described objects, either in total darkness or while hidden behind a screen or similar barrier. Clairvoyance had little association with those who believed they could commune with the spirit world, or look into the future. When Miss Georgiana Eagle allegedly performed for Queen Victoria, clairvoyance was regarded as a *physical* ability, rather than a *spiritual* gift.<sup>ii</sup>

As a consequence of these problems, historians have cast doubt on the authenticity of the timepiece. For example, the Cambridge University historian Malcolm Gaskill in his biography of the medium Helen Duncan discounts the accepted history of the watch with one simple statement:

*A watch supposedly presented to medium `Georgiana Eagle' by the Queen, and later given to Etta Wriedt by W.T.Stead, was a fake (there was a misspelling in the engraving).<sup>iii</sup>*

### The Spiritualists' Account

Fred Archer, the spiritualist writer and former editor of *Psychic News*, published his account of the provenance of the watch in an issue of that newspaper on 23 May 1953. The article was the first in a series on the association of the monarchy with spiritualism, written to mark the Coronation of the then Queen.<sup>iv</sup> However, there is little evidence to support his claims, which even he declared were remarkable. Archer stated that Queen Victoria intended to present the watch to the medium known as Georgiana Eagle, but that Miss Eagle died before the presentation could be made. He further claimed that the Queen then asked the journalist, newspaper editor and spiritualist W.T.Stead to arrange for it to be given to another deserving medium. Stead, according to Archer, consulted other distinguished spiritualists including Sir William Crookes and Alfred Russel Wallace, and decided that the watch should be given to the American direct-voice medium Etta Wriedt.

The earlier date on the inscriptions falls just within acceptable parameters with regard to Victoria and Albert's association with Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert rented the house for a year's trial in 1844 and purchased it in the following year when work began on the construction of the present building. The foundation stone of the Pavilion was laid in July of that year, and this section of the new house was completed in September 1846. The old house was completely demolished in 1848 after the household wing of the new building had been completed. The old house and the Pavilion wing of the present building were therefore in the ownership of Victoria and Albert, and habitable in part at the time that Georgiana Eagle is said to have made her memorable visit.<sup>v</sup>

However, this date would indicate that Queen Victoria was involved in spiritualist practices several years before spiritualism became a unified movement in England. The testimony of the Fox sisters in Hydesville, generally regarded as the essential event that led to the rise of spiritualism in America and then England in the nineteenth century, did not come to the notice of the public until early in 1848. Spiritualism in England

developed in the following decade. The assertion that the Queen was already interested in such practices before this date also contradicts the claims of many spiritualists that Victoria was drawn to spiritualism by the death of Albert.<sup>vi</sup>

More worrying for researchers hoping to confirm the provenance of the watch is the incorrect spelling of Osborne House and the fact that until recently researchers have found no evidence that Miss Georgiana Eagle even existed. Several biographers of Queen Victoria<sup>vii</sup> have consequently asked the rhetorical question: ‘Who was Georgiana Eagle?’ implying that she was probably merely the invention of a spiritualist writer. Certainly, the spiritualist movement has been unable to provide an answer. Her name is not found in any records, and is not known to any spiritualist organisation in any context other than this timepiece.

Seeking an acceptable explanation for the total lack of information about Miss Eagle, the writer and psychic investigator Peter Underwood argues that many clairvoyants avoided publicity:

*‘There are and always have been many sensitives, clairvoyants and mediums who do not seek publicity and who practise solely in private. It would not be in the least unlikely that such a person could give ‘meritorious and extraordinary clairvoyance’ to Queen Victoria without there being any special or royal writing to record the fact.’<sup>viii</sup>*

Addressing the problem of the misspelling of Osborne House, Underwood suggests that one explanation could be the apparent haste with which the plaque had been prepared:

*‘After all, it would seem that Georgiana Eagle was ill (she is said to have died before she received the watch) so it could well have been the case that the Queen asked for the inscription to be completed without delay and the watch despatched with all speed.’*

Underwood further suggests that the need for the preparation and presentation of the watch to be undertaken in haste and in a clandestine manner resulted in mistakes

being made that the Queen would not have been aware of. However, it is difficult to accept that neither the person entrusted with the responsibility of obtaining the engraving, nor the engraver carrying out the work knew how to spell correctly the name of the Queen's residence on the Isle of Wight.

It is also obvious from the shape of the plaque and the position of the watch upon it that it was designed for *two* inscriptions. Its construction would suggest that the inscriptions were made at the same time, probably for the later presentation in 1911. There is also the problem of the implausibly long time lapse of sixty-five years between the two events recorded by the inscriptions. After the apparent haste in which the first inscription is said to have been made, it is supposed that the Queen then waited over forty years until deciding that another medium should receive her gift.

Although it is certainly the case that many spiritualists who believed they had mediumistic abilities kept quiet about their powers, Underwood's theory does not explain the remarkable lack of any information regarding Georgiana Eagle. How did Queen Victoria come to know of Miss Eagle if she was not known to any spiritualist group or organisation? Certainly, research into the early activities of English clairvoyants is limited by the lack of source material. Accounts of mediumistic activity were published in numerous journals *after* 1860, but prior to that date, according to Frank Podmore, documentation is scarce:

*Up until 1860 .... the movement in this country was almost confined to the provinces; the only periodical which succeeded in establishing itself for more than a few months was published at Keighley; there was no prominent centre of interest in London, nor had any publication of importance appeared, in the Metropolis or elsewhere. Towards the end of the decade 1850-60 however, a small group of literary men and others had become interested in the subject, and the Spiritual Magazine, which made its appearance in London in the latter year (1860), continued until the end of 1875 to be the leading organ of English Spiritualism.<sup>ix</sup>*

The earliest date when any account of the activities of mediums was widely published would seem to be 1855, when the Yorkshire Spiritualist Telegraph was first published in the April of that year.

### Georgiana Eagle – Her Magical Antecedents

Previous researchers have been unable to establish the identity of Georgiana Eagle because they have been misled by several false assumptions. By working from the premise that she was an adult medium, probably older than the young Queen Victoria, researchers looked for proof of her existence much earlier in the century than was appropriate. By assuming that she was a spiritualist, they searched the listings of spiritualist publications and the membership records of spiritualist churches and groups, and consequently missed references to her which were as public as the front page of *The Times* in December 1859. Most problematic of all, researchers seemingly failed to consider the possibility that Miss Eagle could have held a more public persona under a different name. By looking for the wrong person at the wrong time, they could not, for instance, recognize the activities of 'The Mysterious Lady' and 'Madame Gilliland Card' as being those of the clairvoyant recorded on the royal plaque.

Miss Georgiana Eagle *did* exist, and she was certainly alive in 1846. However, on the date inscribed on the plaque, she was just eleven years of age. The involvement of children in clairvoyant activities in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was certainly not unknown. Emma Hardinge Britten had begun working as a clairvoyant with the Orphic Circle by 1836, before her thirteenth birthday,<sup>x</sup> and Podmore notes other young practitioners.<sup>xi</sup>

Georgiana Elizabeth Eagle was born on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1834 and baptised on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1835 at St Leonard's, Shoreditch, in the City of London, the eldest surviving daughter of the magician and illusionist George Barnard Eagle and his wife, Jane. George Eagle had been born in Barnet in Middlesex, and had been christened on 13<sup>th</sup> February 1807 in neighbouring Monken Hadley, a village on the Great North Road. He was the son



of George Day Eagle, a publican from Shoreditch, and his wife Elizabeth, and was one of at least three children. Georgiana's great grandparents were French, and had settled in England at the time of the French Revolution.<sup>xii</sup>

Georgiana, from a very young age, followed in the footsteps of her father. George Eagle was a flamboyant performer who adopted several grand stage names such as the 'Napoleon of Wizards' and the 'Royal Wizard of the South', yet his career began in fairground booths and seemingly never graduated beyond the smaller provincial English theatres. He also toured under the stage names of 'Barnardo' and 'Na Barno', but was known to his stage contemporaries simply as 'Barney Eagle'.

In the view of the theatre historian Sydney W. Clarke<sup>xiii</sup>, Eagle was a 'very minor performer' doing ordinary tricks in an ordinary way. He was, however, very skilled in what would now be described as marketing. As theatre critic Michael Kilgarriff explains, in 'Grace, Beauty & Banjos':

*'So potent was Napoleon's spell that to this very day his once-dread name is synonymous with superhuman drive and intensity of purpose. Mr Eagle, who travelled with a large-scale and extremely elaborate magic show, is the only illusionist we know of to have invoked the Corsican's reputation to amplify his hyperphysical appeal.'*<sup>xiv</sup>

Eagle became the most notorious imitator of the more renowned stage magician John Henry Anderson. The 'Annals of Conjuring' describes the fierce competition between Eagle and Anderson and comments that:

*It is rather surprising that Anderson should have thought it worth his while to cross swords with such a humble member of the conjuring fraternity'.<sup>xv</sup>*

It would appear that the sheer scale of Eagle's attempts to copy and parody Anderson meant that the more experienced and professional magician was forced to fight back. Anderson did so by publishing advertisements which allegedly revealed how Eagle performed his tricks. One such advertisement purported to reveal how Eagle achieved one of his illusions and is titled "The System of the Impostor":

*Behold the great Bernardo's system of imposition which he nightly practices on the inhabitants of Birmingham, building his System of Humbug up by copying the Bills and Advertisements of J.H.ANDERSON, the Inventor of Ambidextrous Prestidigitation, with all the list of the Great Wizard of the North's peculiar technical phrases which BERNARDO exhibits in his Bills, (as original) yet can neither pronounce nor understand the meaning of the terms by which he gulls the public.*"<sup>xvi</sup>

Eagle undoubtedly deserved the rebuke. According to magic historian Charles Waller:

*Of all Anderson's imitators, he was the most impudent. He not only trod on Anderson's corns, he got underneath his feet on every possible occasion. He stole Anderson's tricks, copied his patter, and exactly reproduced his programme and billing matter.*

Anderson was convinced that Eagle was illiterate and offered a public bet that his rival could not read the text of his own advertisement as published on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November in the *Birmingham Advertiser*, claiming that it was a direct copy of his own bill published in the Manchester press in the previous week. The phraseology used by Anderson suggests a real sense of malice:

*Barney, when we last met, I merely ruffled your feathers, this time I'll pluck you clean, not one shall be left to spread their (Eagle) wings of imposition."*

However, for all the intensity of Anderson's wrath, there is no evidence that Anderson's expensive retaliations had any effect other than to assure any doubters in the

theatre-going public that it was probably actually worth paying to see Eagle. Curiously, Eagle also has the distinction of being the last conjuror to be threatened with a ducking by superstitious rustics who regarded him as an associate of the powers of evil. He also published one book on illusions, his 'Barnardo's Handbook of Magic' in 1846. It was ghosted, suggesting that Anderson may have been correct in his public utterances about Eagle's ability to read and write.

It is significant that George Eagle incorporated into his act, displays of mesmerism (or hypnotism). He was certainly not unique in using mesmerism as a form of stage entertainment at that time, but Eagle's spin on this popular entertainment was to place his young daughter in the limelight, and according to one observer, Georgiana was a 'good looking girl'.<sup>xvii</sup> An early appearance by father and daughter is reported in the York Courant on 11 December 1846, describing a performance at the Theatre Royal in York:

*(Mr Eagle was) accompanied by his daughter, a little girl of eleven years of age, who is styled by her father "The Mysterious Lady", and judging from her exhibition, the title is not unworthily or inaptly applied. The young lady appears on the stage, and any person in the theatre is allowed to blindfold her, and then commences a series of the most inexplicable mysteries which we ever witnessed.*

A further newspaper quotation, from The Yorkshireman, dated 13 December 1846, and describing the 'unmasking of clairvoyance' by Georgiana Eagle, is quoted as confirming that the act is a deception, yet even more remarkable than the alleged performances of 'real' clairvoyants.

Georgiana joined her father on stage, possibly because of the early death of her mother, and toured extensively with him until his death in 1858. An existing playbill for the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, for Monday 8 March 1841 confirms that Eagle was touring by that date.<sup>xviii</sup> In 1843, she and her father appeared at the Assembly Room, Globe Hotel (location not known). Here Eagle describes himself in his publicity as the

`ambidextrous prestidigitor to Her Majesty the Queen'. Georgiana was billed to appear in the interval as the `second-sighted child or the enchanted little lady.' Georgiana also appeared with her father at Hartlepool Town Hall for three days in January 1847 when she would have been eleven years of age. Here she was billed as `The Mysterious Lady', her act involving mesmerism and clairvoyance.

In February 1846, the year when it is claimed Georgiana performed for Queen Victoria, a playbill confirms that she appeared with her father at the Ashby Theatre in the East Midlands. Again, her act involved clairvoyance. One of her tricks was to tell the time on a watch held by a member of the audience whilst she remained blindfolded on stage, and again one of the headlines of the playbill is `Clairvoyance unmasked'.

George Eagle travelled to Australia in 1856 to perform at the Royal Amphitheatre in Melbourne. Apparently, it was a long journey to a relatively inauspicious venue. In the words of Charles Waller:

*At the time of Eagle's occupancy, the Amphitheatre ranked as a minor establishment.*<sup>xix</sup>

Eagle billed himself as `Wizard of the North, South, East and West', and news of the enmity between him and John Henry Anderson preceded him. It is recorded that he returned for a second short season at the same venue during when, after only two performances, he chose to give himself a benefit. There is also a curious report of another illusionist, Professor James Eagle, working in the Victoria area of Australia in 1860 – after George Eagle's death – who was also billing himself as the `Wizard of the South'. Perhaps George Barnardo Eagle, the great imitator of Anderson, was also imitated.<sup>xx</sup>

Eagle died on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1858 in St Peter's Port on the Channel Island of Guernsey. Georgiana was present at his death, as he fell ill during a performance on stage. The local newspaper published a report of the event:

*On Saturday afternoon, Mr. Barnardo Eagle was engaged in giving an exhibition of magic and clairvoyance at the Temperance Hall. He suddenly felt unwell and in a few moments vomited a large quantity of blood. His eldest daughter, with tremulous voice, announced the sad occurrence to the audience and informed them that as the entertainment was thereby brought to a termination, the money taken at the door would be returned.*

*Mr. Eagle was immediately moved to his lodgings at Mrs. Harrison's, a few doors below the Temperance Hall, where Dr Benjamin Collenette immediately attended upon him.*

*It was found that he had ruptured a large blood vessel in the region of his liver, and the quantity of blood was so great that it was feared that instant death would follow.*

*The haemorrhage was, however stopped, but the patient continues in a most precarious state, and we understand that only slight hopes are entertained of his recovery.*<sup>xxi</sup>

Eagle's will gives his widow's name as Hannah Eagle (nee Edwards), as by 1846, he had remarried and was father to at least five children by her. Whereas Eagle's address is given as 36 Coleman Street (in the City of London), his widow's address is 57 Park Street, Dorset Square, Middlesex, near Regent's Park. Eagle bequeathed his stock of magician's tricks and apparatus to Georgiana:

*"THIS IS THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of me George Barnard Eagle of London Artist I give and bequeath unto Georgiana Elizabeth Eagle my eldest daughter the sum of One hundred pounds sterling together with the whole of my conjuring apparatus to and for her sole use and benefit absolutely."*<sup>xxii</sup>

Georgiana - Her solo career

Her father's death was, understandably, a turning point in Georgiana's life and career. Less than three months after her father's demise, on 27 July 1858, she married Charles Card, a reporter and photographer, at St Marylebone Church in London. He was a reporter from the parish of St Marylebone, and the son of a coach maker.<sup>xxiii</sup> In the following decade there is a notable lack of any record regarding Georgiana's activities. It is possible that she failed to capitalize on her father's name (or notoriety) and left the touring business because without her father's gift for self-publicity Georgiana found it difficult to secure stage bookings. Or perhaps her husband insisted that she remained at home. However, on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> December 1859, she placed an advertisement in *The Times*, seeking work:

*Private Parties Attended for Christmas Holidays. Miss Georgiana Eagle, the celebrated enchantress, will give her wonderful, amusing and scientific entertainment in Magic (with splendid apparatus). Electro biology and mesmerism in London and the vicinity. Address: 176 Tottenham Court Road.*

In September 1867, Georgiana's life changed course again. By that year she was a widow. She married Alfred George Joseph Aloysius Gilliland, a professor of music who was to become her manager and agent. Alfred Gilliland had been born in about 1842/4 in Grahamstown, a small settlement near Port Elizabeth in the Cape Province area of what is now South Africa. He was the son of Frederick Thomas Gilliland, also a professor of music.

Their marriage took place on 25 August 1867 at St Stephen's Church, Coleman Street in the City of London, and their residence is given on their marriage certificate as 16 Tokenhouse Yard, London, a small yard in the heart of the City of London off Throgmorton Street. In a short while she returned to the stage. She appeared in public again in about 1872 as Madame Gilliland Card, billed now as 'the world-famous wizard queen, humourist and mesmerist.' In that year, she performed at the Royal Agricultural Hall in London, giving her 'novel and renowned magical, comical, musicale and sensational mesmeric entertainment' with her second husband as the supporting act, who

was billed as 'the musical phenomenon, vocal comedian and versatile grotesque instrumentalist.' In the following year they appeared together at the Athenaeum in Bristol on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1873.

Later that year, Georgiana appeared at the Corn Exchange, Cheltenham for six nights from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December 1873 where she was billed as the 'World Famed Wizard Queen, Humourist and Clairvoyant Mesmerist (from the Royal Agricultural Hall, London)'. The programme for these nights was:

*Part 1<sup>st</sup>*

*Temple of Fairyland, her mirthful and startling Exhibition in Japanese and European Magical Illusions.*

*Part 2<sup>nd</sup>*

*Magical interlude by Mr Alfred G. Abney*

*Part 3<sup>rd</sup>*

*Mesmerism by Madame G. Card.*

A further playbill confirms that the couple also performed together at the Berner's Hall of the Agricultural Hall in Islington, though the date is not known. Abney is billed as being 'from New York, U.S.'. According to *The Annals of Conjuring*, her chief illusion at this time was the now obsolete 'bird cage and skeleton stand'.

It was perhaps part of a clever advertising campaign – a gift for self-promotion no doubt learned from her father – but at the same time as her normal playbills were published, notices also appeared making charges against her style of hypnotism. In the 1881 census, the couple is listed as living at 76 Torrano Avenue in London. No children are mentioned, but her occupation is described as an 'artist'.

Georgiana married thirdly, a man who was her junior by twenty five years. He was Harold Pashley, a draper. They married on 30 May 1888 in Kentish Town and their home was at 2 Montpelier Road in the Finchley district of London. In the 1901 Census, they are recorded as living at 41 Albert Street in the St Pancras district. No children are mentioned, but the census records that Georgiana's niece, Alice Eagle, then aged twenty two years, the daughter of Georgiana's younger half-brother, William Thomas Eagle, is living with them.

Georgiana was buried on 10 March 1911 at the age of seventy six years in Abney Park cemetery, Stoke Newington, London, where her second husband Alfred Gilliland was buried on 14 September 1882.

#### Queen Victoria and W.T.Stead

As with other elements of the story, it is difficult to accept the claim that Queen Victoria later contacted W.T.Stead for advice about who should be the final recipient of the watch. Stead was well-known as a newspaper editor and social campaigner, but was not converted to spiritualism until 1892, more than forty years after the date when the watch was to have been presented to Georgiana Eagle (though of course he considered and investigated spiritualist activities before this date). Although it is known that Victoria approved of Stead's work in rescuing children and women from prostitution, it would seem more likely that the Queen, if seeking a senior figure in the spiritualist movement, would, though a trusted third party perhaps, have contacted the Society for Psychical Research or some similar organisation with standing.

It does appear possible that the American medium Etta Wriedt did become the owner of the watch. She made several visits to the British Isles, and 'performed' in Wimbledon, near London, in May 1911 as Stead's guest, two months before the later date on the plaque, though there is no record of if, when or where she received the watch. The date on the plaque is, of course, some nine months before Stead lost his life in the



Titanic disaster. According to Fred Archer, Wriedt later decided that the watch should be returned to England, and asked the former Canadian Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, who often attended her séances, to deliver it. He passed the watch to the Duchess of Hamilton and she presented it to the College of Psychic Science, where it remained until stolen in 1963.

#### Georgiana Eagle, Gilliland and W.T.Stead

Although the exact relationship between Alfred Gilliland and the Gilliland family into which W.T.Stead's daughter married is not yet clear, Georgiana Eagle's marriage in September 1867 to her manager and secretary Alfred Gilliland links the two inscriptions on the plaque.<sup>xxiv</sup> This familial connection offers a far more acceptable explanation for W.T.Stead's interest in the watch than the story told by Fred Archer. There may also be descendants of Georgiana Eagle still to be identified: there is a record of a further marriage of a Georgiana Elizabeth Gilliland in the St Pancras district of London in June 1888, who may be a daughter of Georgiana and Alfred. At about this time, it is noted that the manager of the Athenaeum in Bristol, where Georgiana and Alfred Gilliland performed in May 1873, was an M.Gilliland.<sup>xxv</sup>

More is now known of the Gilliland family to whom Stead was related through his daughter Pearl. Three members of this family worked on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph* in London. They were brothers William and John, and their father, also named William. William Gilliland (senior), who was born in 1843, married Margaret Mulligan in Bristol in June 1876. She was born in 1853, the daughter of an Irish merchant called Thomas Mulligan who had been born in 1813. This William Gilliland became an assistant editor on the *Daily Telegraph*, distinguished himself as a war correspondent, and later joined the Reuters news agency.

William and Margaret's eldest son, William (1878-1937) also became a journalist and later joined the *Daily Telegraph*. Pearl Stead (1889-1973), daughter of W.T Stead, married the younger son, John Mulligan Gilliland (1883-1940). He became the third

member of his family to follow journalism as a career, and followed in his father and brother's footsteps. With the *Telegraph*, John became a distinguished reporter 'in the field', covering dramatic stories such as a journey undertaken by a specially-designed motor vehicle from Cape Town to Cairo in 1913, on which he travelled as one of the passengers, filing regular reports throughout the journey up the spine of the African continent. John's obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* on 6<sup>th</sup> July 1940 read:

*Mr J.M.Gilliland yesterday, in London, aged 57. He had been on the editorial staff of The Daily Telegraph for many years and was the son of a former assistant editor.*

John M.Gilliland and Pearl had two children, John Roy Stead Gilliland (1918-1986), who married Joan C.Speckett (born 1924) and Peggie Gilliland (born 1921). John and Joan Gilliland had four children, three of whom married and had children.

### Conclusions

Confirmation of the identity of Georgiana Eagle and her connection by marriage with the Gilliland and Stead families does not allow unqualified support for the story of the watch. The early date on the inscription of 1846 would appear to be acceptable, given that the young Georgiana was appearing on stage with her father at that time.

Although there is no documentary evidence yet of the Eagles' performance at Osborne House, their tour 'circuit' was based on the south of England, a geographical area which would obviously have included the Isle of Wight. On several playbills, George Eagle claimed to have performed for Queen Victoria and other members of the Royal family. A playbill, undated but about 1847, reproduced in Albert Wood's 'Victorian Delights', claims that 'the Royal Wizard', Mr Barnardo Eagle, had been patronised by three crowned heads, namely George IV, William IV and Queen Victoria. Eagle described himself as the 'royal wizard of the South', suggesting, or at least claiming, royal consent to his act, and as the 'ambidextrous prestidigato to Her Majesty the Queen'.

There is no mention in any reference material to Georgiana or her father being involved in spiritualism. She was a stage performer, and although she used descriptive phrases on playbills as 'manipulator of the twilight zone', she publicised herself as an illusionist and not a medium. Several playbills, including one dated 1846, seem to scorn the claims of mediums, promising that Georgina will reveal their trickery, and unmask their fraud. The billing for the appearances of the Eagles at the Ashby Theatre in February 1846 even describes Georgiana as the 'gigantic destroyer of the fraud of clairvoyance'. As noted above, one element of Eagle's publicity material was to perform, through trickery and deception, greater illusions than the so-called 'real' mediums of the day. Only in the Guernsey newspaper report of George Eagle's death is there a reference to (his) 'magic and clairvoyance' act. It seems, therefore, highly improbable that Georgiana would have appeared before Queen Victoria in the role of a spiritualist clairvoyant.

The claim that Georgiana died before the watch could be presented to her has led researchers to assume that Georgiana was of mature years by 1846 and consequently died soon after her alleged appearance at Osborne House. In fact, she was still performing on stage in the 1870s and possibly later. The story could only be true if the presentation of the watch was planned much later than 1846.

Conjecture should not be a tool of the historian and researcher but can perhaps offer one conclusion to this story. Perhaps the young clairvoyant and her father were invited to perform in private before Queen Victoria, and the queen was so entranced by the young girl's charming disposition that she gave her an impromptu gift of the gold watch. Georgiana treasured this souvenir of the moment she met the Queen of England, and, on her death, this fascinating artefact and the story of the event it recorded passed from her second husband, Alfred Gilliland, to his descendants within the Gilliland family line, finally reaching John Mulligan Gilliland who acquainted his father-in-law, W.T.Stead, with its history.

It is also possible that Georgiana attended a séance conducted by Etta Wriedt. Georgiana died in March 1911 which just postdates Wriedt's first visits to London. Perhaps Stead felt that this artefact was the perfect 'gift' for the well-known direct-voice medium Etta Wriedt, through whom, it is said, Queen Victoria's voice was heard at séances in London and elsewhere. Wriedt visited England on five occasions, the earliest being in 1911, and may have accepted the gift and returned with it to America. An alternative hypothesis therefore suggests itself, that Georgiana attended one of Wriedt's séances, and was so moved by hearing Queen Victoria's voice through the mediumship of Wriedt that she volunteered to present the watch to the medium, perhaps in the knowledge that she was close to the end of her own life.

William Lyon Mackenzie King was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1874 and served three terms as Prime Minister of Canada between 1929 and 1948. He was educated at the Universities of Toronto, Chicago and Harvard, and as well as his political qualifications and experience, King was a journalist, editor and author. At the time of Wriedt's visits to London in 1911, he was reaching the end of a term in Government in which he had served as the Liberal Minister of Labour. He returned to Canadian Government in 1921 as the country's tenth Prime Minister. His last political appointment was in 1949, and he died on 22 July 1950 in Quebec. Biographers describe him as being a very 'ordinary' person:

*He had no captivating image, he gave no spellbinding speeches, he championed no radical platform. He is remembered for his mild-mannered, passive compromise and conciliation. Yet Mackenzie King led Canada for a total of twenty-two years, through half the Depression and all of the Second World War. Like every other prime minister, he had to possess ambition, stamina and determination to become prime minister and, in spite of appearances, his accomplishments in that role required political acuity, decisiveness and faultless judgement.<sup>xxvi</sup>*

King's involvement in spiritualism is well-documented. He took up spiritualism in about 1919, and continued to practice and investigate it for the remainder of his life. Together with his close friend Joan Patteson and mediums such as Etta Wriedt, it is said

that he communed with a variety of spirits, including his mother, his grandfather William Lyon Mackenzie, St Luke and St John, all of whom he regularly consulted on his career and life. His strong spiritualist beliefs and friendship with Etta Wriedt suggests that King would have been inclined to such an act as the return of the watch to England. An incident recounted by a personal friend reveals that he also held England in strong affection:

*The most extraordinary acquisition came in the darkest days of the Second World War when Britain's survival seemed to hang by a thread. Late one night in 1941, Mr. Pearson, then on the staff at Canada House, was called at home with a "Secret and Most Immediate" cable. It was not some decision that would change the fortunes of war, but a request from the Prime Minister for a few stones from the Palace of Westminster, which King had learned, had just been bombed by the Germans. As Pearson notes in his memoirs, the Office of Works was overwhelmed with repairs vital to the very life of London. Nevertheless, the British, with private comments happily unrecorded, complied with the request. "This heavy and historic freight was shipped safely through the submarines to add a new distinction to Mr. King's ruins at Kingsmere."<sup>xxvii</sup>*

Likewise, the third Duchess of Hamilton had a strong interest in spiritualism and in many 'fringe' sciences. She is regarded, for instance, as one of the earliest and strongest supporters of Homeopathy.

As for the notorious misspelling of Osborne House, perhaps it was Mackenzie King, and not Queen Victoria, who commissioned the plaque and its confusing inscriptions. Even more likely is that the plaque was constructed by a well-meaning person who was involved at the time the watch first went on display at the College of Psychic Studies, probably in the years immediately following the Second World War.

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Grace Eckley, Editor, ‘NewStead’ (Journal of the W.T.Stead Memorial Society) – Information regarding W.T.Stead and Queen Victoria.

## References

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<sup>i</sup> Formerly the London Spiritualist Alliance and then the College of Psychic Science.

<sup>ii</sup> See Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (University Books Inc, New York, reprinted 1963), Vol 1, 141-153, for a (critical) description of the performance of clairvoyants contemporary with the young Georgiana Eagle.

<sup>iii</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Hellish Nell*, (Fourth Estate, London, 2001) 266.

<sup>iv</sup> Fred Archer, *Psychic News*, Issue 1094, London, 23 May 1953, 1-2 under the banner “Queen Victoria’s Séance”. A photograph of the watch and its plaque is reproduced at the foot of the front page.

<sup>v</sup> Information from the National Monuments Record, English Heritage South East Region Facilities Branch, Osborne House, Isle of Wight, courtesy of the curator, Michael Hunter.

<sup>vi</sup> Albert died in 1861. Spiritualists have long claimed that, whilst in mourning, Queen Victoria sought the mediumship of spiritualist and journalist Robert James Lees, and later of her servant at Balmoral, John Brown.

<sup>vii</sup> Elizabeth Longford, *Victoria RI*, (London, Wiedenfeld & Nicholson, 1964) 337.

<sup>viii</sup> Peter Underwood, *Queen Victoria’s Other World*, (London, Harrap, 1986) 106-8.

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<sup>ix</sup> Podmore, Vol.2, 163.

<sup>x</sup> Robert Mathiesen, *The Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten: Some Chapters in the History of Western Occultism, in Theosophical History Occasional Papers, Vol IX*, (Pasadena, California, The Theosophical Society, 2001), p.12.

<sup>xi</sup> Podmore, Vol.2, 160ff.

<sup>xii</sup> Amy Dawes in Frances Marshall (compiled), *Those Beautiful Dames*, (Magic Incorporated, Chicago, April 1984) 45.

<sup>xiii</sup> Sidney W. Clarke, *The Annals of Conjuring*, (New York, The Miracle Factory, 2001), 141

<sup>xiv</sup> Michael Kilgarriff, *Grace, Beauty and Banjos- Peculiar Lives and Strange Times of Music Hall and Variety Artistes*, (London, Theatre Communications Group Inc, 1998) p.96.

<sup>xv</sup> Clarke, 141.

<sup>xvi</sup> Clarke, 224.

<sup>xvii</sup> In the opinion of Charles Waller in *Magical Knights in the Theatre*, (Gerald Taylor,) 17.

<sup>xviii</sup> Extant playbills consulted are as follows: Theatre Royal Plymouth, 5 April 1641 (George Eagle), Assembly Room Globe Hotel, 4/5 October 1843 (George Eagle and 'Miss Eagle'), Ashby Theatre, 12-18 February 1846 (George Eagle), Town Hall Hartlepool, 26-28 January 1847 (George Eagle and 'The Mysterious Lady'), Berner's Hall Islington, 1872 (Madame Gilliland Card), Athenaeum Bristol, 5 May 1878 (Madame Gilliland Card), Corn Exchange Cheltenham, 1 December 1873 (Madame Gilliland Card).

<sup>xix</sup> Waller, 17.

<sup>xx</sup> There are references to Prof James Eagle in the Victoria Police Gazette (2 August 1860) regarding the theft of one of his tricks, and in the Maryborough & Dunolly Advertiser (8 August 1860), Ballarat Star (25 August 1860) and the North Western Chronicle (27 September 1860) regarding his performances. The above are all provincial newspapers within the Victoria region. There is a further reference to this illusionist in James Bodell, *A Soldier's View of Empire: Reminiscences of James Bodell 1831-1842*, (Ed Keith Sinclair, 1982).

<sup>xxi</sup> News report in *The Star*, Guernsey, 4 May 1858.

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<sup>xxii</sup> Probate of George Barnard Eagle “of 36 Coleman St, London Auction Mart, Gentleman, died 5 May 1858, in Guernsey. Will Probated 19 June 1858, Principal Registry Executor: Hannah Eagle of 57 Park Street, Dorset Square, Middlesex the widow, the relict & one of the executors”.

<sup>xxiii</sup> “Marriage: County of Middlesex. 159. 27th July 1858. Husband: Charles Card, of full age, bachelor, reporter, St Marylebone, son of Charles Card, coachmaker. Wife: Georgiana Elizabeth Eagle, of full age, spinster, St Marylebone, daughter of George Barnard Eagle, artist. Married in the Parish Church according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Established Church, by Licence, by me, W. Burton Crickmer, Curate. This marriage was solemnized between us, Charles Card and Georgiana Elizabeth Eagle, in the Presence of us, Mark Perks and Eliza Edwards”.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Amy Dawes.

<sup>xxv</sup> A note in the index to playbills at the Templeman Library, University of Kent at Canterbury.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Canada's Prime Ministers, 1867 - 1994: Biographies and Anecdotes. [Ottawa]: National Archives of Canada, [1994]

<sup>xxvii</sup> Robert A. J. Phillips, in a talk given to the Historical Society of the Gatineau, Canada, Sept 1981

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