

Biography of Frederick Bligh Bond (1864-1945)

An architect, archaeologist, and psychical researcher, Frederick Bligh Bond (June 30, 1864 to March 8, 1945) is most remembered for his excavations of Glastonbury Abbey in southern England, purportedly with the help of long-dead monks.

In 1908, Bligh Bond, a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects and a member of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, was appointed director of excavations at the abbey by the Church of England. This was a non-paying, seasonal job, one which Bond, who specialized in ecclesiastical architecture, took on as something of a hobby while he continued his regular architectural practice in Bristol.

A great-grand nephew of Captain William Bligh of *Bounty* infamy, Bond had developed an interest in psychic matters well before taking on the Glastonbury dig. He was a member of the Society for Psychical Research, and it was through this organization that Bond befriended Capt. John Allen Bartlett and began experimenting with automatic writing. Initially, neither Bond nor Bartlett accepted the popular hypothesis that the phenomenon is the result of discarnates controlling the nervous system of the medium. They looked upon it as a tapping into some universal memory or cosmic consciousness. However, because the communicators seemed to have distinct personalities, Bond changed his mind and accepted the spirit hypothesis.

Anticipating his appointment as director of excavations, Bond wondered if he might get some clues as to where to dig by means of automatic writing. He and Bartlett made their first attempt on November 7, 1907. Bond would place two fingers on the back of Bartlett's hand, a method often employed in automatic writing to add whatever psy-

chic power a "sitter" might have to that of the medium's power. "Can you tell us anything about Glastonbury," Bond put the question to an unseen communicator, or, as he apparently then understood it, to the universe. In clear, eloquent English, the answer to Bond's question came back: "*All knowledge is eternal and is available to mental sympathy.*" After a short interval, the following flowed from the pencil: "*I was not in sympathy with monks – I cannot find a monk yet.*"¹



Subsequent sittings during November resulted in a hodgepodge of communication, some in English, some in Latin, some in monk Latin, a combination of Old English and Latin. Some were signed, some were not. Johannes Bryant emerged as the chief communicator, speaking in monk Latin, but there was often a change of influence so that it was not always clear as to the identity of the communicator. As a group, the communicators referred to themselves as "The Watchers."

The communications continued regularly over the next few months, sitting number 27 taking place on March 17, 1908. Apparently, because it took the excavators some time to catch up with the initial messages, they were less frequent after that, sitting number 61 coming on December 9, 1912, nearly five years later. Much of the information was very precise, some of it accurate to the inch,

but the overlapping construction resulted in confusion at times. Exactly how much the “spirits” helped Bond in his excavations is uncertain, since progress would have been made with more orthodox excavations and there is no way to determine how much, if any, Bond’s unorthodox methods varied from the orthodox.

For some 10 years, Bond had kept his mystical sources a secret from the Church of England, sharing it only with a few friends, including Dr. Ralph Adams Cram, a fellow architect who met Bond in 1912 and urged him to write out the whole story for publication, and even offered to do it for him. But Bond rejected the idea, as he believed that it would meet with disfavor by the Church of England.

Bond was eventually persuaded to write a book, and *The Gate of Remembrance* was published in 1918. As he anticipated, it invited contempt from the Church and scorn from fellow professionals. His reputation was further compromised after the publication of *The Hill of Vision* in 1919. That book rehashed some of the material in his first book, but went on to include automatic writing produced in sittings with several different mediums concerning World War I and other matters not pertaining to Glastonbury Abbey.

In early 1921, insult was added to injury when a co-director of excavations was appointed by the excavation committee. Because Bond refused to work with the new co-director, he was relieved of his duties in April, 1922. As his professional clients had been abandoning him since the publication of his first book, Bond was, by this time, in dire financial straits, a situation compounded by an earlier divorce and lengthy litigation concerning custody of the couple’s daughter.

From 1921 to 1926, Bond edited, as a part-time endeavor, *Psychic Science*, a quarterly publication of the College of Psychic Science. During the 1920s, Bond sat with Geraldine Cummins, who produced the “Cleophas” scripts by automatic writing. As Bond felt he contributed to the scripts

by his presence, he sued for a share of the book’s revenue. The court found against him.

In August of 1926, Bond left for the United States on a lecture tour under the auspices of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR). Following the lecture tour, he was persuaded to remain in the U.S. and work with Cram in his Boston architectural practice and to accept a part-time position as educational director for the ASPR as well as editor of the organization’s journal. In 1926, Bond became involved in the investigation of the Boston medium, Mina S. Crandon, known as “Margery.” Initially, Bond was convinced of the genuineness of Crandon’s mediumship and strongly defended her against attacks by some researchers. Later, after evidence indicated that the spirit thumbprint of “Walter,” Margery’s deceased brother, was fraudulent, Bond condemned Crandon. Since he did not clear his public condemnation of Crandon with the ASPR, he was dismissed by them.

Sometime around 1932, Bond was ordained a priest of the Old Catholic Church of America, an offshoot of the Episcopal Church. Exactly what his priestly duties entailed is not clear, but it apparently did not satisfy Bond, as he returned to England in January, 1936. He died in 1945, living his final years in rooming houses in North Wales, most of his time devoted to doing oil sketches of various churches.

Bond died alone, apparently still believing in the imaginative function. “Give it truth to feed upon and it will evolve truth,” he ended his first book. “And through the door of truth may enter that which will guide us to a wider knowledge.”²

Visitors to the Glastonbury Abbey museum and gift shop today will find only scant references to Bond, none of it mentioning his mystical sources.



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¹ Bond, Frederick Bligh, *The Gate of Remembrance*, B. H. Blackwell, 1918, p. 32.

² *Ibid.*, p. 158.