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First prepared in October 2006 by the Survival Research Institute of Canada (Debra Barr and Walter Meyer zu Erpen). Capitalization of any name or subject in the text below indicates that you will find an entry on that topic in the forthcoming third edition of Rosemary Ellen Guiley's *Encyclopedia of Ghosts and Spirits* (October 2007).

King, William Lyon Mackenzie (1874-1950).

Canadian prime minister and spiritualist. William Lyon Mackenzie King was born on 17 December 1874, in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario. A lawyer and political scientist, he was elected leader of the Liberal Party in 1919 and first became prime minister in 1921. He served in that position for a total of twenty-two years (1921-25, 1926-30 and again in 1935-48), until his retirement from politics in 1948. For several decades King kept a detailed diary of his daily activities, including his contact with mediums and other individuals in the spiritualist field, and his attempts to obtain through MEDIUMSHIP evidence of SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH of deceased family member and friends. Disturbed by a series of deaths during and immediately following World War I, including those of his father, mother, brother, sister and a close friend, he turned to mediums and fortune-tellers for SPIRIT messages and guidance.

During the 1920s he started a series of consultations with Mrs. Rachel Bleaney, a fortune-teller from Kingston, Ontario. When visiting London, England, to attend the Imperial Conference in 1926, he met with SIR OLIVER JOSEPH LODGE and recorded Lodge's comments on the ordering of human lives by spirit beings, and the need for faith on the part both of mediums and sitters.

In 1931 King visited Detroit to attend a SEANCE held by the American medium Henrietta (Etta) Wriedt (1859-1942). The following year, King was invited to the Brockville home of Mrs. Fulford, the widow of a Canadian senator, where he experienced the DIRECT VOICE MEDIUMSHIP of Mrs. Wriedt, who would become his favourite medium. Throughout the rest of this decade King traveled frequently to Detroit to attend additional seances, and upon occasion Mrs. Wriedt visited Ottawa. In 1933 he met medical doctor THOMAS GLENDENNING HAMILTON at his Winnipeg residence where they discussed the Hamiltons' PSYCHICAL RESEARCH experiments; the next year he pursued new contacts in England. Among other individuals he spoke with Lady Aberdeen, whose husband had been Governor-General of Canada from 1893-98. She told King that she had received evidence through AUTOMATIC WRITING of the continued existence of her recently deceased husband; and King revealed to her in turn that he had contacted Lord Aberdeen himself through table rappings. Spending time in England again in 1936, after a trip to the League of Nations in Geneva, he visited the London Spiritualist Alliance. Following a seance in 1933 attended by Dominion Archivist Sir Arthur George Doughty (1860-1936), King and his close

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friend Joan Patteson (1869-1960) took up the practice of table-rapping at their residences in Ottawa. They claimed to receive frequent messages from King's mother, his brother Max, and former Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier (1841-1919).

In the 1940s King continued to consult mediums in England, among them Lilian Bailey (1895-1971) and Hester (Travers-Smith) Dowden (1868-1949). In 1945 the London Spiritualist Alliance arranged sittings for him with Mrs. Dowden, who practiced automatic writing, and GLADYS OSBORNE LEONARD (1882-1968). Two years later the organization put him in contact with additional mediums including a Mrs. Sharplin and Miss Geraldine Cummins (1890-1969). During his final visit to London in 1948, once again he met with Mrs. Leonard and Miss Cummins.

In addition to his regular attempts to obtain spirit communication, King had been interested in other aspects of the occult since at least 1918, including interpretation of DREAMS, numerology, the meaning of coincidences and the reading of tea leaves.

During his lifetime, King's spiritualist beliefs were known only to his close friends and immediate colleagues. For the most part he wanted his pursuits to remain private and stayed away from association with organized groups. The professional mediums he consulted guarded his privacy closely.

Not long after King's death on 22 July 1950 at "Kingsmere," his country estate in Quebec, his beliefs became known when the British *Psychic News* published a letter telling of the late Prime Minister's interest in SPIRITUALISM. The story was picked up by *Maclean's Magazine* in December 1951, then by Canadian newspapers. Attention focussed often on the extent to which he might have relied upon messages from the spirit realm to direct his decisions. In her *Unseen Adventures* (1951), Geraldine Cummins describes sittings that she held for a British Commonwealth statesman, who was most assuredly Mr. King. In their initial meeting, his identity had been concealed from her. Cummins was impressed by her visitor's "realistic and critical analysis of evidence presented by other psychic experiments. He was far too intelligent to be credulous, and his observations on the subject were to me very instructive."¹ Two years later, following a second sitting that warned about potential troubles in Asia, the statesman had said that "he made it a rule to ignore advice thus given: he trusted solely to his own and his advisers' judgment."²

¹Geraldine Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, Appendix II, p. 178.

²Geraldine Cummins, *Unseen Adventures*, Appendix II, p. 179.

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King's voluminous personal papers were acquired by Library and Archives Canada. Unfortunately, in 1977, his literary executors made the decision to burn the notebooks in which mediums had apparently recorded their impressions in response to questions King had asked.³ The remaining records about his Spiritualist activities were closed and only opened to researchers in 2001, a full 50 years after his death.

Through experience, King had discovered that attempts to predict the future by asking for counsel from spirits were rarely productive; he understood that seances were not to be used for fortune-telling. While he never relied upon spirit messages, he was nonetheless bolstered by them. Convinced that his loved ones lived on, over the years William Lyon Mackenzie King received a great deal of comfort from his belief in their enduring presence.

Further Reading:

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³Gordon Robertson, *Memoirs of a Very Civil Servant* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 55.