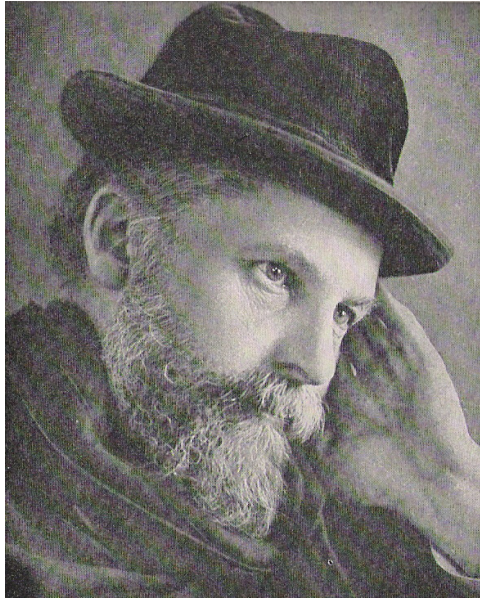


Ave Roma Immortalis *(Hail Immortal Rome)*



by Trevor Hamilton

The charismatic leading figure in the British Society for Psychological Research (SPR), Frederic W. H. Myers, died on January 17, 1901 in Rome. His was an unusually impressive, even noble exit (as his friend William James, who was in Rome at the time also receiving medical treatment, testified). It was a death eased by his conviction, through his long, indefatigable research into psychic phenomena, of individual post-mortem survival. After his passing, his close friend and fellow researcher, Margaret Verrall, tried to develop automatic writing to see if she could make contact with him. Her first comprehensible piece of script came on March the 5, 1901. It was the start of a vast collection of automatic writing and occasional speaking produced by her and a number of others (mainly women but one man also contributed) over thirty years or so. Many researchers into the paranormal have argued that this body of material provides some of the finest evidence for life after death since it distributes fragmentary communications across a number of the automatic writers, which only make sense when they are put together and decoded. This method, the investigators assert, proves, as near as one can, that telepathy between the living is not the source of the information received.



Mrs Margaret Verrall

Ave Roma Immortalis is an example of one of the simpler cross-correspondences, as they came to be called. It involves just two automatists – **Margaret Verrall** and two languages – Latin and French. Verrall (Mrs. Verrall in the original documents) was a Cambridge classicist and a graduate of and lecturer at Newnham College, Cambridge.

Her husband, A.W. Verrall, was also a classicist, and a fellow and tutor of Trinity College, Cambridge. **Alice Fleming** was the sister of Rudyard Kipling and had distinctive literary gifts herself. She wrote under the



pseudonym of “Mrs. Holland” because of her husband’s hostility towards psychical research.

Alice Fleming became involved largely because of her reading of Myers’ *Human Personality and Its Bodily Survival of Death* (1903) published posthumously. It revived her interest in automatic writing and she wrote, from India, to Alice Johnson, of the SPR, for guidance and began to send her scripts. Alice Johnson eventually became the main conduit for Alice Fleming’s scripts and eventually published a study in the *Proceedings* of the SPR, examining their links with the material produced by others, particularly Margaret Verrall, in the early years.

The evidence comprising the *Ave Roma Immortalis* cross-correspondence is displayed below in strict chronological order. Laying out the matter in this way, one can see that a puzzle is posed in the three scripts of Margaret Verrall and the clue to solving it is provided by Alice Fleming’s single script.

On March 2, 1906, Mrs. Verrall wrote in Latin:

“Not with such help will you find what you want. Not with such help, nor with those defenders of yours. First among his peers, himself not unmindful of his name; with him a brother related in feeling, though not in blood. Both these will send a word to you through another woman. After some days you will easily understand what I say; till then farewell.”

On March 4, 1906, Mrs. Verrall wrote in English:

“Pagan and Pope. The Stoic persecutor and the Christian. Gregory not Basil’s friend ought to be a clue but you have it not quite right. Pagan and Pope and Reformer all enemies as you think.” **Then, in Latin:** “The cross has a meaning. The Cross-bearer who one day is borne.

In English again: “The standard-bearer is the link.”

On March 5, 1906 Mrs. Verrall wrote in Latin:

“The club-bearer/key-bearer with the lion’s skin already well described before this in the writings. Some things are to be corrected.” **In English:** “Ask your husband he knows it well.” **In Latin again:** There stand the columns where Calpe has been left. That is the end. No you have left out something. The columns (broken) by incessant reading.”

On March 7, 1906, Mrs. Holland wrote in English:

“Ave Roma immortalis. How could I make it any clearer without giving her the clue?”

Commentary

Mrs. Verrall recognized that her very first sentence referred to a passage in Virgil’s *Aeneid* describing the aged King Priam of Troy buckling on his armour to defend his city against the Greeks. However, the other statements puzzled her. Her husband said that he had an idea what they meant but did not tell her except to say that the phrase first among his peers (*primus inter pares* in Latin) was often applied to the Pope. On March 11, she received extracts from Alice Johnson of Mrs. Holland’s script on March 7. On reading it, her husband

declared that it confirmed his original intuition. The statement of March 4 reminded him of Raphael's picture of Attila the Hun frightened by the vision of St. Peter and St. Paul who appeared as Pope Leo I rode out to stop Attila invading Rome in 452. The picture is in the Vatican. This was one of four paintings produced by Raphael between 1512 and 1514 for Julius II and then Leo X to symbolise divine help afforded to Rome and its Popes against internal and external enemies. In the picture there is a cross-bearer to the Pope's left and to the right of Attila is a standard-bearer. St. Peter and St. Paul descend from the sky with swords and St. Peter carries keys in his left hand. The background shows the city of Rome and the Coliseum.

Given the original guiding phrase (*Ave Roma* etc.) Alice Johnson, after substantial research, concluded that the cryptic words and sentences all reflected different aspects of Roman history; and that the overall theme was the triumphant rise of Rome – starting with Aeneas leaving Troy to found Rome in Italy. Key incidents in the history of Rome are alluded to: St. Peter and St. Paul, the guardians of Rome and the Rock on which the Roman Church was founded; Pope Leo I repulsing the barbarian challenge and saving Rome; Pope Gregory I establishing his spiritual and military independence from the Emperors at Constantinople; Popes Julius II and Leo X who developed Rome artistically and intellectually; and Pope Sixtus V, who rebuilt Rome and laid out its modern streets and put St. Peter and St. Paul on the two great columns (replacing Trajan and Marcus Aurelius – the stoic persecutor of Christianity). In addition, the story of the growth of Rome was a symbol for the evolution of the human race and its increasing civilisation and spirituality which Myers, when alive, deployed on several occasions in his writings. See his essay on *Virgil* and his *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (v 2).

Some students of the cross-correspondences have objected to the method of interpretation in this and other cases. They argue that Alice Johnson, and her colleagues, just cherry-picked sections of automatic writing to make them give a meaning that was really the product of coincidence and over-subtle interpretation. Yet, almost everything in Mrs. Verrall's three scripts is used in the interpretation, and the statements, though terse, are obviously in the form of puzzles to be solved. They are not just a collection of random, semi-surrealistic offerings. Moreover, Mrs. Holland's single script is on a number of quite different topics, which have references to other cross-correspondences entirely, with, however, the statement re *Ave Roma* inserted apparently and solely to provide a specific clue to Mrs. Verrall's material.

There are several criteria one can use to estimate whether chance or deliberate planning is the most likely explanation of this and other cross-correspondences. The first is to look for any specific signalling, in the scripts themselves, that a cross-correspondence is indicated. The second is to examine the time gap between each separate piece of writing. The greater the period between scripts and the greater the number of scripts produced would all

suggest an increased likelihood of chance playing a part in generating patterns and coincidences. The third is the nature of the cross-correspondence. Is the link between word and/or theme purely superficial or does it seem insightful and meaningful? The fourth is to look for evidence that the 'script intelligence' (a term often used by the early investigators) is actively monitoring the accuracy or otherwise of the messages that are getting through. For example:

- Gregory not Basil's friend ought to be a clue but you have it not quite right
- Pagan and Pope and Reformer all enemies as you think
- The cross has a meaning
- The standard-bearer is the link
- Some things are to be corrected
- Ask your husband he knows it well
- No you have left out something
- How could I make it any clearer without giving her the clue?

On the other three criteria also, many students of this large body of automatic writing find the evidence persuasive that a designed cross-correspondence was intended in this and a multitude of other cases. Clearly, a cross-correspondence is anticipated in the instruction to wait a few days and a woman will send a message and then you will understand. Equally clearly, the relevant clue is announced in Mrs. Holland's script of a few days later. And the correspondence is not the repetition or near repetition of a word or part of a word which could easily be explained by mere chance or over interpretation. It is a phrase, *Ave Roma Immortalis* that throws a searchlight on Mrs. Verrall's scripts and clearly links them all together in a coherent form. In addition, these very words were used as the title of a popular history of Rome, at the time of Myers' death, by F. Marion Crawford. Note, too, that all this took place within six days and not over months or years; and *Ave Roma Immortalis* only occurs twice again in the 2,500 (approx.) published scripts between 1901 and 1936 and on each occasion in an appropriate context.

Finally, if it is agreed that we have here a cross-correspondence which shows unambiguous elements of organisation and planning, who or what put in the considerable mental effort to produce it? Was the origin subconscious telepathy on the part of Mrs. Verrall or A. W. Verrall? However, note that nothing in Mrs. Holland's script reproduces anything that was in Mrs. Verrall's, but it merely and economically provides the key clue to help explain the puzzle. In addition, Mrs. Verrall had not spotted that her writing described stages in the history of Rome, so telepathy between the two of them seems ruled out. A.W. Verrall had not initiated the experiment, nor had he any prior intention of doing so. He was merely shown his wife's scripts as they were written. And while there are many interesting examples of telepathy both under laboratory and real world

conditions, there are very few, if any, that show the organisation and complexity of the cross-correspondences. One ought to state, however, that it is not possible, theoretically, to rule out Super ESP (telepathy/clairvoyance) as an alternative explanation, only that the sense of design, intention and purpose exhibited in this and other cross-correspondences make it, for many students of the scripts, a less likely solution.

There are other things one could comment on but they would introduce an extra layer of detail not necessary in this context. For example, space forbids the full outlining of Miss Johnson's sometimes intricate argument (especially re the link between lion's skin, Calpe and columns). However, it is worth pointing out this cross-correspondence of March 1906 was one of those that encouraged Miss Johnson and J.G. Piddington (who eventually became the main interpreter of the scripts) to try to stimulate 'Myers', through a message given in Latin to the trance medium Mrs. Piper, to produce a series of complex cross-correspondences that would render the Super ESP hypothesis even more implausible. Such fascinating and impressive cases as Hope, Star and Browning and Alexander's Tomb were the result.

Trevor Hamilton has degrees from Oxford, London and Sussex Universities. He retired from his post in higher education at the end of 2006 to write on the history of psychological research. His first book : Immortal Longings: FWH Myers and the Victorian Search for Life after Death Imprint Academic Exeter 2009 is now in paperback and has been well received. He is working on a book about the cross-correspondences with a publication date of provisionally mid 2013

