

Sister's signature is spirit test

This year it is exactly one hundred years since the birth of Anthony Borgia, who was responsible for some of Spiritualism's finest ever books, though he is best-known for "Life In The World Unseen," "More About Life In The World Unseen" and "Here and Hereafter." All give graphic accounts of spirit world existence. Though currently out of print, it is hoped they will be republished at some stage.

Though the books he wrote in tandem with a "dead" priest are well-known, few Spiritualists can claim extensive knowledge of Mr Borgia, who has a fascinating psychic story.

Here Marjorie Hesford, who knew the medium for some years, describes Mr Borgia's life, citing some of the paranormal happenings which occurred both to the medium and his family.

Details of books by Mr Borgia which are currently available appear on page 38.

THIS year is the centenary of Anthony Borgia's birth. He was born in October 1896 into a wealthy family, the youngest of five children whose parents were descended on the one hand from a branch of the famous Borgia family and, indirectly, on the other, from the liaison between King Charles II and Nell Gwynn.

Anthony's life-long love of history stemmed from his childhood interest in Hampton Court Palace, quite close to his home, for his nurse was engaged to a member of staff, so most of his first forays into the outside world naturally veered in that direction!

Anthony became very familiar with the great palace and its grounds, a connection reinforced by his parents' friendship with the palace historian, Ernest Law, and his two sisters, who lived in apartments there.

The costumes of these two ladies was considered rather eccentric, for every Sunday they attended church dressed entirely in black, unrelieved save for white lace ruffles at the throat, in a style which so closely resembled the Elizabethan period that they might have been two ladies-in-waiting from the Hampton Court Palace of that time.

There was another slight connection with a royal palace in that an uncle of Anthony's was a musician in the orchestra which played at court functions held in Buckingham Palace. Many years later when Anthony became a regular member of the weekly circle held by trance medium Mollie Duncan, they were both intrigued to find that Mollie's father had played in the same orchestra at the same time.

Although the family were Roman Catholics, the psychic abilities of several members were treated as perfectly natural and never discouraged.

Mrs Borgia was strongly clairvoyant,

frequently able to predict events of a private and public nature, such as the coming of both world wars and the death of various prominent figures, giving the respective dates years in advance.

She was acquainted with some of the leading Spiritualists of the day, members of the Society for Psychical Research and the then British College of Psychic Science, and attended numerous seances and demonstrations of various kinds of mediumship.

It was at one such demonstration that Mrs Borgia witnessed a wonderful materialisation of her sister Josephine, who passed on from pneumonia while still a young woman.

Not only did Josephine materialise perfectly and walk about the room, her beauty, for which she had been noted, drew gasps of admiration from the sitters, but she picked up a pencil and wrote her name on a piece of paper placed on a table for the purpose. Mrs Borgia kept this remarkable souvenir for years, but, sadly, it was lost during a house move.

Both Anthony's sisters became nuns. One, Germaine, soon realised she had no vocation, and left her Order to continue in secular life the nursing career for which she trained in the convent.

Germaine was a fine artist – a talent shared to a lesser degree by Anthony – although not so good as her mother, whose work was of a professional standard.

When, during her convent days, the Mother Superior died, Germaine was asked to draw her likeness as she lay in her coffin.

Unfortunately, Germaine's psychic gifts proved an embarrassing hindrance

to complying with this request, because the elderly face before her was completely and continuously overshadowed by the smiling features of a much younger woman, the Mother Superior as she had been once, and doubtless as she then looked on the Other Side. This face was all that Germaine was able to produce. Good as it was, it was met with great disapproval!

Germaine's clairvoyance manifested several times in connection with her art work. Once, in her teens, she had just completed a drawing of a neighbour's house when she felt impelled to add flames bursting from the upstairs windows. This troubled her and, she felt, spoiled her picture. But three days later the upper storey of this house was devastated by fire.

Germaine married, leading a busy life with her husband and daughter. Although she had no strong interest in Spiritualism, her psychic gifts functioned throughout her life and she had many fascinating experiences.

She was always close to her brother Anthony, eager to hear about the books he wrote, deciding on one occasion to translate the first one into French.

After working on it for some time, Germaine put her manuscript away in a drawer, until she had more leisure to continue.

Coming to it several days later, she was amazed to see that an alteration – for the better – had been made to her French text, in handwriting different to anyone else's in the house, and in different coloured ink. Neither her husband nor daughter were capable of making such an alteration even if they had wished, and could throw no light upon the matter.

Anthony's eldest brother, Gordon, was an extremely powerful trance medium who also possessed considerable gifts in various other forms of mediumship, including healing, but little of this surfaced until after the First World War.

Unlike Anthony, who never found the tenets of the Roman Catholic religion acceptable even as a boy, Gordon was still strongly influenced by the religion of his upbringing, even to having at one time considered becoming a monk.

Gordon found the manifestations of his mediumship very hard to cope with, doing his best to suppress and ignore them. In time, however, he threw off all his old beliefs and embraced Spiritualism wholeheartedly.

For the rest of his life, though he never chose to become a professional medium, Gordon gave many private demonstrations of what Anthony and everyone else who witnessed them considered a quite astounding degree of mediumistic ability.

Under the influence of his guide, Radiant Wing, for whom he had a deep affection and close rapport, Gordon was able to perform some very remarkable displays of healing.

Gordon was thirteen years older than Anthony, so in his youth the latter saw little of his eldest brother, who was often away from home for months at a time, travelling the world as an orchestral pianist and, at times, as an actor.

He had two amazing escapes from disaster, the first in Jamaica where he was on tour in 1907 at the time of a devastating earthquake which buried him for hours in the rubble of the hotel in which he was staying. Then, in

1912, travelling to America to appear in a Broadway production of "The Belle of New York," Gordon was a passenger on the tragic maiden voyage of the "Titanic."

When the impact came, he was one of the many swimming amongst the wreckage. After about half an hour of this, Gordon managed to straddle a floating spar and was eventually picked up by a Norwegian vessel. In a way, it must have come as something of a relief to have passed away in his own bed, after a mild heart attack, at the age of 73!

The first sure indication of Anthony's psychic ability came when, at the age of seven, he carried to his mother a letter which had just been delivered, asking who had died, because the envelope had a black border.

His mother told him there was no black border to be seen, but when she read the letter it told of the passing of an old friend.

Clairvoyance and clairsentience continued throughout Anthony's life, but his predominating mediumship was clairaudience and, frequently, automatic writing, on which occasions he would often feel the weight and warmth of the spirit communicator's hand on his own, guiding the pencil across the paper.

When ten years old, Anthony was accepted into the Choir School of Westminster Cathedral, an event which was to have a far-reaching influence on his life, for it was here that he first met Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson, whose words he was to record years later via clairaudient mediumship, and set down in seven books.

Although he knew Monsignor for

only a few years, the impression on Anthony was lasting. He found, as did many others who met Monsignor, that his vivid personality with its enthusiasm, sense of humour, quick wit, kindness and lively interest in so many things, was unforgettable.

Anthony encountered Monsignor more often than he would normally have done as a member of the Choir School, because his ability to copy down musical notation speedily and accurately, not to mention his clear handwriting, soon had the Choir Master, Sir Richard Terry, making use of him as a sort of "musical secretary."

As Monsignor's own love of music and his friendly association with Sir Richard brought him frequently into his office when he was at the Cathedral, Anthony was able to get to know him quite well.

Monsignor also helped to produce the Christmas Nativity plays performed there, in some of which Anthony sang treble solo.

One such performance drew this comment from a newspaper reviewer of the occasion "...in his one vocal effort, the singing of the Magnificat was thrilling. There is no other word for it." That soloist was the 12-year-old Anthony.

He always remembered with affection his association with the Westminster Cathedral Choir and its first Choirmaster, Sir Richard Terry, a great musical scholar who brought to public attention an enormous amount of magnificent early church music, raising the choir to such a standard of excellence that it was considered the equal of the Vatican choir itself.

In the 1940s, Anthony was very

pleased to be able to add a small contribution to a biography of Sir Richard by the Oxford University Press.

Not that life for the choristers was all singing; it was a school. Pupils had lessons to learn, exams to take and games to play.

For them, however, these games had to be played as quietly as possible. When residents of the tall Victorian apartment blocks which overlook the school's playground complimented their Headmaster on the lack of noise from pupils even when playing football and other team games, they did not know the true reason.

As Anthony said, the boys would not have dared risking the wrath of Sir Richard, a stern taskmaster, if their singing voices had been impaired for the next church performance by raucous shouting during games!

Anthony's passion for music, and its influence in his life, foretold by a clairvoyant when he was hardly more than a baby, manifested at an early age and was always encouraged, especially by his father, who had a good singing voice and was devoted to opera.

Anthony played several musical instruments – piano, organ, clarinet, flute, oboe, and all types of recorder from the smallest to the huge bass recorder.

He wrote music for all these instruments too, and during the 1930s and 40s was a member of a small amateur group of woodwind players who gave private and public concerts, including in some of their programmes music he had written for them.

Shortly before the start of the First World War most of the family wealth was lost as a result of deception by Mr

Borgia's business partner. Anthony's mother had warned her husband about this man, but despite his experience of her accurate clairvoyance, he was unable to bring himself to believe that this could happen.

The shock may have had its effect on his already-failing health, and he died suddenly in 1913, after which Mrs Borgia sold the family home, finding it far too big for her now that all her children, except Anthony, were elsewhere, pursuing their respective careers.

Mrs Borgia arranged to live with relatives in Kent, but Anthony thought he would like to see something of the world, so made a start by accompanying family friends who were emigrating to Canada. When that country entered the war, however, he joined the Canadian Army and returned to Europe.

When Anthony was demobbed, he met up again with Gordon, who had been in the British Army. Feeling at something of a loose end, Anthony decided to join him in London, where they shared lodgings and looked for work in the theatre.

Gordon was already experienced as an actor and producer in musical shows and reviews. Although Anthony never had the same interest in acting as his brother, he worked steadily throughout the next decade or so, travelling around Britain in various shows and dramas.

During his life, Anthony turned his hand to many things – he worked on a fruit farm, in a bank, did freelance translation work, wrote magazine articles mainly, though not invariably, on musical or psychic themes.

Anthony also wrote and directed the music for several shows and pageants,

amateur and professional, as well as giving lectures on Early Church music or carols. For several years he was a reader for a large publishing company.

During the 1930s Anthony moved to Brighton. When the Second World War broke out he was considered too old for conscription, so volunteered for fire-watching duties, subsequently spending much of the war on the roofs of the town's department stores and office buildings!

Almost at the outset of the war, he met Mollie Duncan, the splendid non-professional trance medium of whose circle he was a member for 25 years, and where he and Gordon witnessed Monsignor's first appearance at a seance.

Sir Richard Terry also came through Mollie's trance mediumship several times, though Anthony, and others with clairvoyant vision, saw him on other occasions, such as at a lecture Anthony was giving, with vocal demonstrations from a quartet of singers, which included some carols written by Sir Richard.

Many people manifested through Mollie's circle, some with names which were very well-known on earth and who, for the most part, had links of some sort or another with regular sitters or occasional visitors to the circle.

Anthony's own Borgia and maternal ancestors came through now and again. On one occasion he was thrilled to see, standing close to the medium through whom another spirit visitor was then speaking, a vividly clear clairvoyant manifestation of Lucrezia Borgia dressed in a magnificent pink brocade gown of the sort she would have worn when on earth.

Anthony heard her clairaudiently, identifying herself. Another visitor to the circle also saw her, expressing his delight at the clarity with which he could see her.

Some of the spirit visitants were the composers, musicians and singers Anthony and Gordon had seen frequently in their own home, and whom they regarded as dear friends.

Plainly, though, it was Monsignor who was the spirit communicator with the greatest effect upon Anthony's life, and for whom, over fifteen years or so, he recorded seven books, some of which have rarely been long out of print, and all of which will soon hopefully be in print for the first time at the same time.

The first book "Beyond This Life," was serialised by the "People" newspaper, coming out, appropriately, on Easter Sunday, 1942, after which it was published in book form by Feature Books, a subsidiary of Sidgwick & Jackson, the Sidgwick of which was, interestingly enough, a relative of Monsignor's.

The next book came out two years later, entitled "The World Beyond." When in 1954 Odhams Press took over the publication of Anthony's books, they put these first two titles into one volume and called it "Life In The World Unseen."

From 1945 to 1948 four more books were published by Feature books – "ABC of Life," "Facts," "More Light" and "Heaven and Earth."

Then in 1956 the last book appeared, "More About Life In The World Unseen," although three years later Odhams brought out a new addition of "ABC of Life" in a slightly modified

form and gave it a new title, "Here and Hereafter." "Life In The World Unseen" was translated into French, German, Dutch, Portuguese and Thai.

At one time it was on sale in 23 countries, and is currently available in Australia on audio cassette tapes, particularly helpful for blind or partially-sighted people.

As a change from scripts given by Monsignor, 1945 saw the publication of "Twelve Carols For Christmas: set to music by Anthony Borgia."

This came about because the editor of Feature Books received some carol verses written by the children of a school in Suffolk, and asked Anthony if he would consider writing some music for one of them, giving him all twelve to choose from.

On reading them, he felt he should compose melodies for all, but as he put it: "Carol melodies appear so simple, yet they ought to conform to certain musical rules. Although I knew these rules, I had never before composed a carol. Twelve at once seemed a daunting task!"

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Anthony sent out to Sir Richard Terry, by then on the Other Side, knowing that this expert on carols could give invaluable advice.

The result, delighting the children, their headmistress and many others who came across it, was this book. Anthony's eldest sister, Philippa, a nun who taught music and English at a convent school, requested several copies so that she could give them to her young pupils.

Mediumship and psychic phenomena of many kinds filled much of Anthony's life; over the years he probably witnessed or experienced virtually the

whole range they had to offer.

His knowledge of psychic matters was vast; he learned a great deal from wise spirit teachers, and his own mediumship was of a very high standard, aided by his sensible attitude towards it.

Anthony applied stringent but fair criteria in judging anything purporting to come from spirit sources, whether via his own mediumship or anyone else's, and was in no way credulous or careless in such matters.

During the periods he was writing the books, he was anxious that the accuracy of the scripts should have independent verification, insofar as this was possible.

At the weekly trance circle he would always check with Monsignor that every word had been heard and transcribed accurately.

Monsignor took care to ensure that his medium was not overtired during these sessions, which usually lasted about an hour.

As soon as he felt that the power was beginning to wane, he stopped speaking immediately, sometimes in the middle of a sentence, but always began again at the next session from exactly where he had left off.

When taking down the scripts Anthony was sometimes very conscious of sensations and emotions appropriate to the information or descriptive matter being given.

This could be very pleasant, as, for example, the feeling of warmth and elevation of spirits experienced when the high realms and their inhabitants were referred to.

He would often smell beautiful perfumes during descriptions of the flow-

ers and countryside, but of course, there were far less pleasing moments when the dark realms were being spoken of; Anthony would almost shiver with cold and flinch from the putrid stench that assailed him until he firmly closed his mind to them.

During the years they shared a home, Anthony and Gordon often seemed to share a sort of joint mediumship, through which phenomena such as materialisations, levitation, telekinesis, apports and book tests all occurred from time to time, to the great interest of themselves and their visitors.

Occasionally tremendously loud blows were heard within cupboards or on wooden furniture, sledgehammer crashes rather than raps!

Anthony had to ask the spirit communicators responsible to "tone it down a bit" in case of complaint from neighbours. The old army friend of Gordon's responsible for most of this particular phenomenon apologised, saying he had no idea he was making so much noise!

On one occasion a silver box, some scissors and a pair of spectacles were apported from their London lodgings to the home of a family friend across the city. He was a member of the British College of Psychic Science and investigated the incident, subsequently making a report for the college's quarterly journal.

Like his mother, Anthony was able to prophecy future events from time to time, although this was not a major part of his mediumship.

One aspect of this prophesying had a physical effect he particularly disliked; this was the forecasting of earthquakes.

During this he would actually under-

go the sensations, to some degree, of being in such a disaster, feeling the house rocking and shaking about him and often having to hold on to furniture in case he should fall, so strong were the physical sensations, even though he knew perfectly well that the earthquake was not happening at the time and was, in any case, to occur hundreds of miles away.

He requested his guide to remove this "side effect," if possible, as he found it so unpleasant. Something must have been done because after that, although his ability to prophecy earthquakes was unimpaired, he no longer felt as though he was taking part in them.

Anthony had many interests and studied many subjects; he enjoyed painting in water colours, studied heraldry and produced fine reproductions of coats-of-arms; he was a keen photographer, loved clocks and steam trains and knew a good deal about their workings.

As a treat for his ninth birthday it had been arranged for him to travel in the driver's cab of a train leaving his home station for London; he never forgot his enjoyment of the occasion.

A great reader, he had at one time over 4,000 books on all sorts of subjects, including nearly 2,000 on Spiritualism and psychic matters alone.

He was an ardent fan of the works of Dickens, P. G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Sherlock Holmes" stories. Indeed, he was a great admirer of Sir Arthur, and said that one of the thrills of his life was to find himself sitting next to him at one of the lectures given at the Queen's Hall by the Rev Vale Owen, another man he admired.

Quickness in seeing the funny side of things was always to the fore with Anthony. His sense of humour never deserted him, undoubtedly helping to sustain him through years of virtual blindness which were surely a sore trial, although he treated it all without a trace of self-pity.

His life was not without its sorrows and troubles, of course, some of them very considerable.

Anthony's lack of sight must have brought distress and frustration despite his unfailing lightness of heart, and the long years without the woman he dearly loved cast their own particular shadow, but as ever, his private griefs were kept to himself.

He was kind, tolerant, never paraded his knowledge, and always tried to help wherever and whenever he could, attempting to give comfort, consolation and to share his knowledge of spiritual truths with the many who wrote to him from all over the world after reading his books.

The peaceful atmosphere of his Brighton home, which was, by material standards, outwardly small and comparatively unprepossessing, was remarked upon by almost everyone who visited him; even those who sought him out in great distress of mind felt themselves calmed and helped simply by being there.

In 1972, severe glaucoma was diagnosed, which came as a great shock to Anthony, for he had experienced no symptoms of this disease. It advanced rapidly. Within a few years his sight had almost gone, despite the best efforts of conventional medicine and the kind help of healers.

Anthony could no longer follow all

those pursuits he had always so much enjoyed – reading, painting, writing and composing music; even playing his musical instruments was no longer the pleasure it had been, because of increasing frailty and a degree of rheumatism in his hands, but he bore it all with his customary good humour, always appreciative of the help he received from friends and neighbours.

In the spring of 1989 Anthony had a serious fall at his home, and was no longer able to remain there, so friends took him to live with them and to care for him, but he never really recovered from the shock of the fall, and passed away the following July.

On that morning, a relative living many miles away awoke with a great sense of joy and exhilaration, as if, she said, hundreds of people were gathering for some wonderful celebration.

She had no idea why she felt like this, but later that morning, when she received the news that Anthony had passed away just a few hours earlier, she was convinced that she had “picked up” the atmosphere and circumstances surrounding this event, and that after 93 years on earth, Anthony was at last being welcomed into his true home.

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