

Jenny Cockell (author)

Jenny Cockell is an English author whose books describe her memories of previous lives and her successful attempts to trace some of them to real individuals and events. The most detailed, first recounted in *Yesterday's Children* (1993), is of an Irishwoman who died in 1932 aged 36, leaving behind eight children. Cockell later verified a second life, following Mary Sutton, and believes she has also confirmed certain memories of a nineteenth century life in Japan, as a girl who drowned aged seventeen.

Life

Biographical Overview

Jenny Cockell was born in 1953 in Barnet, Hertfordshire. Her father was an electronics engineer, her mother a housewife. Her early family life was troubled by her father's anger, which she later attributed to the suppression of his homosexuality. Her parents separated when she was thirteen. She married and settled in a Northamptonshire village, where she continues to live. Until retirement, she worked as a podiatrist. She has a son and daughter.

This article presents an overview of Cockell's life and writings. She is one of very few people whose memories of more than one past life have been verified. The most detailed and best known of these is as [Mary Sutton](#), an Irishwoman who died in 1932.

Early Psychic Experiences

Cockell first realized she was different from other people when she heard a Sunday school teacher talking about death and was puzzled that, in common with everyone else, he made no mention of past lives. She raised the subject with her mother, who responded considerately, but talked about reincarnation as a belief rather than an accepted fact.

Similarly, until she was eight she believed that premonition was normal, as she often dreamed about events that occurred in reality soon afterwards.

Until the age of seven Cockell had two ghostly friends, a young man in army uniform from World War II, who talked and joked, and an older man, who was quieter, and gave her advice. They appeared real to her, and she knew they were people who had actually lived.

I regularly had long conversations with these two: we communicated mentally, and although I don't remember our talks in detail they were very comforting and important to me. We didn't talk about everyday things but about feelings and matters of a more spiritual nature. The older man would advise me on how to be, and how not to let others try to change the person inside; he would try to build up my confidence by telling me about his own experiences.^[1]

Cockell describes incidents she experienced as an adult of spontaneous telepathic connections with family members. In one episode,

while visiting a friend, I was hit by an emotional shockwave, which came from outside myself. I knew something was terribly wrong with a family member, and hurried home. I was relieved when Steve [her husband] arrived back safely, but when I telephoned my mother she immediately told me that my younger brother had moved out of his increasingly difficult marriage and was in a very emotional state.^[2]

In 1986, her brother Michael was fatally injured in a gliding accident:

Alan was telephoned first and had the added worry of trying to locate the rest of us. At the exact moment when he received the call, my family and I were in a service station on the M1 [motorway], and I was about to sit down with a cup of coffee. Suddenly the whole room seemed to spin and I fell into a seat, spilling some coffee. I was shaking and felt like crying; I told Steve something terrible had happened, but it was not until we got home that we learned of Michael's death.^[3]

Cockell also reports a premonition of a naval disaster:

I suddenly became very dizzy and had to sit down. I felt that I was in a ship, trapped in a small corridor with about four men. It looked rather like the interior of a submarine and felt horribly claustrophobic. The ship was on fire and the doors at each end were sealed; the men were trapped. For about fifteen minutes I was sharing the last moment of these men, and they were terrified. The fear left me when I felt them die, but the shock remained with me for a considerable time.

Several people asked me if I was all right and I told them what I had seen and felt. Next day it was reported in the news that *HMS Sheffield* had been sunk by enemy fire the previous evening.^[4]

Cockell describes experiencing brief visions of the future, usually fragmentary images 'seen in almost subliminal flashes that left me with a feeling rather than a complete picture'.^[5] These often had to do with floods and other natural disasters, and consistently featured an absence of population, both human and animal. Her short-term precognitions usually turned out to be true, so she trusts her visions into the distant future.

Mystical Experience

Cockell describes a mystical experience that occurred while she was walking home one day in 1969, aged sixteen:

Had I known the term, I might have described it as an out-of-the-body experience. But I was not just out of my body: I was *within* something else. It was as if some part of me had become joined with the energy of the trees; then it seemed to be stretched out to join with other living things, at first plants, then further afield, until I felt I was touching a tremendous variety of life forms, both plant and animal.

In these brief moments I sensed an awareness of life as a whole unit, of a connection between all aspects of living energy. I was also aware of the way in which everything was constantly changing form as each being lived and died, returning to the energy of the whole. I understood life and death as a constant cycle, and that individuals are never completely separate from the whole. I experienced my whole lifetime as though it were a single picture, and realised the sense of continuity, of lives after lives.

I understood that there was no need for fear, no need to feel alone. At the same time I felt insignificant but not without value, for I was integral with that energy that was the whole of life. This realisation left me both comforted and exhilarated. My worries no longer seemed important. No longer did I feel like an isolated individual: I knew that I was a small part of something much greater, within which we were all connected.^[6]

Past-Life Memories

From an early age, in dreams and while awake, Cockell experienced persistent memories of having lived as an Irish mother of eight children named Mary, seemingly between the 1890s and the 1930s.^[7] She recalled the family's cottage in a rural hamlet and the locality where she often walked, the appearance and personalities of most of the children, and routine activities such as cooking and going to church. A dominant memory was of Mary's death in a place away from home. Mary died young, and throughout Cockell's childhood she felt a strong sense of guilt at having abandoned the children.

Cockell also remembered having been a young girl in nineteenth century Japan.^[8] This, she felt, had been a pleasant life as a member of an affluent family whose home had a veranda overlooking the sea. The life ended when she drowned aged seventeen, having fallen off a ferry on her way to marry the older man her father had chosen for her. Here too she retained feelings of guilt, worrying that she might have embraced death to escape the marriage, letting her father down.

A third set of spontaneous memories, of an unhappy life in the mid-eighteenth century, was of a French peasant girl named Anna who was sold into domestic service aged eight. Cockell also has memories of a Neolithic life as a young hunter, which was especially happy, conveying a sense of freedom and adventure.^[9]

Memories of other past lives emerged under hypnotic regression. She considers these less reliable; however, she later realized that one in particular – of a boy named Charles Savage who died in 1945 in an accident at age six – was consistent with a childhood dream and phobias. Eventually, she was able to find his death certificate and confirm his existence.^[10] Others include a young girl named Jane Matthews in the mid-nineteenth century, who ran away from an abusive father and died of starvation aged fifteen, and a deaf boy in the east of England in the mid-seventeenth century.^[11]

Future-Life Impressions

On a car journey in 1990, Cockell first experienced in a waking state the experience of being a two-year old Nepalese girl named Nadia.^[12]

Almost instantaneously with seeing and feeling her, I accepted her as just that. I knew that she was called Nadia and that she was a part of me. There was no problem as far as I was concerned in accepting that she was nothing to do with my present lifetime, however improbable it might at first seem, I simply knew that Nadia was who I would be in my next life. I also felt, uniquely, that she was aware of me: that I was the self who was being remembered.^[13]

She further writes, 'this didn't feel relived or remembered; it felt alive, as if I were being touched by this future existence.'^[14]

More images followed during hypnotic regression. She felt that the life started around 2040 in a village in the mountains of eastern Nepal. She was first looked after by her grandmother; later she was the mother of a small boy working in the fields. She visualized details of the scene: red and crumbly soil, local topography, simple food, local coinage, vegetation and bird life.

Intermission Memories

Cockell says that one of the most dominant memories of the Mary Sutton life was of dying in hospital, and of what occurred afterwards, but that she was hesitant to share it. By the time she came to write her second book, *Past Lives, Future Lives*, she had started to encounter descriptions of [near-death experiences](#), and included a detailed account. She remembered lying in a bed in a Dublin maternity hospital, in isolation. Then she knew that she had died, feeling 'suddenly thrust out, rather like a buoy cut loose from its moorings'. She settled some ten feet above the body and

remained there for some time, observing a priest come to the bedside. Then she seemed to be sucked into 'a narrow tube-like fold in space, a dark vortex that wrapped around me and drew me into another dimension' as the hospital room drifted away and faded.

Now, intensely bright beams of light began to emerge on either side of me. They were prismatic, like the shafts of the rainbow, but much, much brighter. To describe them as light seem somehow insufficient: the rainbow colours were much more vibrant than normal light, just as a real rainbow is much more vibrant than one drawn in crayons. The shafts of light passed by me at different angles and then spread out as though radiating from a central focus, though somewhat randomly.

She then emerged into 'somewhere very peaceful and gentle, far between any normal understanding of the words'.

I found myself floating inside something like a soap bubble; above, below and all around me were other bubbles that I knew to be people. I was bodiless, and this didn't matter at all; there was no need for a body. The other bubbles seemed to have the peaceful energies of other people, also without bodies yet seemingly complete, and I felt a total, peaceful empathy with them.

The sensation was of being almost like a single cell within a whole constellation of cells, yet also of being far too much of an individual entity to be contained in one unit so small. I was still aware of being myself, an individual soul. Every bubble glowed brightly with an energy that I took to be the basic life force that is ourselves, and they pulsated at rhythms which varied from a slow heart-rate beat to a steady vibration.

Enveloping everything was a feeling of calm, a unique calm in which nothing seemed to matter or hurt or worry. Here the existence I had left behind, physical life as we know it, seemed no more than a vague memory. Perhaps it simply became less important as time went by-the notion of time itself had almost no meaning. There was no demarcation between day and night, just constant, peaceful light. Nor was there any sense of boredom. This is quite difficult, I find, for people to understand. This state of being is so utterly different from physical life that it is hard to put into words, but without bodies there is no need for activities and diversions. It is enough just to be. Yet, although apparently inactive, we seem to end up as more than we were when we started.

The bubble energies that were other people seemed to feel close all around me – yet this was nothing like being in a crowd of bodies, which can give rise to all kinds of feelings like hostility or claustrophobia. I had the sensation of being surrounded and enfolded by what I can only successfully describe as love. There was a wonderful sense of being incorporated within some much larger dimension of existence.^[15]

As Cockell became better acquainted with the research on reincarnation, she learned that memories of the period between lives were called [intermission memories](#), and in *Living With Past Lives*, she returns to the subject.^[16] She says she recalls not only events from her three previous lives, but also her three previous deaths, and something of the aftermath of each. Only with Mary Sutton, however, did she have the experience of seeing her lifeless body. She had some sense of a life review following Mary's death and of going to a place of light, which she compares to near-death experience.

Living with Past Lives

In *Living With Past Lives* (2021), Cockell discusses what it is like to have past-life memories as a child and as an adult. Most of her memories came to her spontaneously, in the waking state or dreams, but these were augmented by regressions under hypnosis. In researching her memories, Cockell

discovered that much of what she envisioned under hypnosis was distorted in some way and she is highly critical of regression as way to learn about past lives.^[17]

Asperger Syndrome

When she was 63, Cockell was diagnosed as a high functioning autistic. Asperger's helped make sense of certain personality quirks she had experienced all of her life: social anxieties, sensitivity to noise, meltdowns from sensory overloads, but also positive traits like the ability to focus obsessively on chosen tasks. Cockell believes that her Asperger's helped in her determination to find Mary Sutton's children and research her other lives, keep careful notes, and go through the process of revision necessary to produce her books.^[18]

Investigations

Ireland

Having started a family of her own, Cockell felt strongly motivated to try to trace the family she believed she had left behind in Ireland as 'Mary'. As a child she had identified Mary's hometown as Malahide, north of Dublin. She drew maps based on her memories, which she later found matched maps of the locality. Although she did not remember her surname, the correspondence gave her confidence that she could trace the family home at Swords Road, about a mile from the centre.

In June 1989 she visited Malahide, finding that the roads and buildings conformed to her memories. Later she was able to identify a house in Swords Road that had been occupied by a family of several children, whose mother had died in the 1930s, named Sutton. This led eventually to the discovery of their birth certificates and Mary's death certificate.

In 1990, she came into contact with Sonny, one of the Sutton boys, who confirmed that Cockell's memories were accurate for the life of his mother, and accepted that she was his mother reborn. Over the next years, before the publication of *Yesterday's Children (Across Time and Death*, in its American edition) in 1993, she was able to make contact with all of Mary's children.

For details of this case and its reception, see [Jenny Cockell \(Mary Sutton reincarnation case\)](#).

Japan

As the memories of the past life in Ireland came to be verified, Cockell felt a growing urge to trace her memories of a life in Japan, which she believed immediately preceded it in the late nineteenth century. In *Past Lives, Future Lives* (1996) and *Journeys Through Time* (2008), she describes her strongest memory, as a young girl looking at the sea view from the veranda at the back of her father's house. She recalls the topography of the bay, details of the house and other houses nearby, and the main village in the valley, with a track that ran past the house.^[19]

Her father held a position of minor importance; the family was well off, and it was a calm and ordered life. She was not allowed to mix with the village children. She had several sisters and at least one brother, about seven years younger. Many more fragmentary memories had to do with garments and sewing.

A particularly strong memory was of her father taking her on a journey by ferry to meet the man he had chosen to be her husband, and being distressed to find he was middle-aged. Then she was on the ferryboat again, on the way to the wedding. Close to the shore the boat collided with a small fishing vessel; several passengers were thrown into the water. There followed a moment of panic, then a transition to a state of calm and peace.

As a child, Cockell tried to identify the location by an instinctive form of dowsing, similar to what she had used to identify Mary Sutton's Malahide, running her hand over a map and waiting to be drawn to a sensation of warmth. Using the school atlas, she was drawn to the northwest corner of Kyushu, the southernmost island of Japan. More detailed maps showed the nearest town as Kitakyushu, a large port city slightly to the east of the coastline she felt drawn to.

Another town named Kokura seemed vaguely familiar and might have been the embarkation point for the ferry, she felt.

In 2002, Cockell travelled to Japan at the invitation of a television production company, which documented efforts to trace the life she recalled. The film crew made several attempts to mislead her by taking her to alternative locations, before arriving at the one which she had tentatively identified from her earlier researches, but were unsuccessful in locating a family consistent with her memories. She continued her quest from England with the help of a researcher in Japan. They were unable to identify the girl or her immediate family unequivocally. However, they felt confident they had traced the girl's extended family, whose members confirmed that a house exactly corresponding to Cockell's memories had formerly existed where she located it, at the edge of the cliff.^[20]

England

Cockell was more successful with her memories of Charles Savage. In childhood, she experienced a recurring dream of dying in an accident, run over by a milk float (van) at six years old. She felt that she had been a boy, but she did not know his name. As an adult, in one of her regression sessions, she seemed to relive this death, but as a result of illness. She recalled the name Charles S and had a sense of where and when he had lived, which allowed her to track down his death certificate.^[21]

The death certificate showed that Charles's full surname was Savage and that he had died in 1945, so he had lived after Mary Sutton. Interestingly, the death certificate listed the cause of death as from 'injuries accidentally sustained as a result of being run over by a motor lorry', consistent with her childhood dream, but contrary to what she had seemed to recall under hypnosis.^[22]

Eventually, Cockell was able to trace a member of Charles's family, who confirmed other memories that surfaced under hypnosis, and she realized that other early memories that had come to her in the waking state also related to Charles. She also learned that Charles's family, like Mary's, were Irish Catholic, but they had moved from Ireland to Gateshead in northern England before Charles was born. She could discover no other connection between the families of Mary and Charles.^[23]

The identification of Charles Savage in addition to Mary Sutton makes Cockell one of very few people whose memories of more than one previous life have been verified.

Books and Videos

Books

Cockell has related her life story and past-life memories in several books:

- *Yesterday's Children* (1993)
- *Past Lives, Future Lives* (1996)
- *Journeys Through Time* (2008)
- *Past Lives Eternal* (2017)
- *An Asperger's Journey* (2019)
- *Living With Past Lives* (2021)

Videos

YouTube videos featuring Cockell include:

- a 2017 [interview](#) with Cockell about her past-life memories.
- an [episode](#) of the 1990s British television show hosted by Michael Aspel, *Strange But True*, which features an examination of the Mary Sutton case.
- a [6-minute trailer](#) of a CBS television film version of *Yesterday's Children* starring Jane Seymour in the dual roles of Cockell and Mary Sutton.

Cockell tells the back-story of these and other media appearances in *Living With Past Lives*.^[24]

Critical Reception

The high profile of Cockell's memories of Mary Sutton, related in both books and videos, has led to substantial push-back.

American sceptic investigator Joe Nickell has proposed that Cockell's description of herself shows traits of a fantasy-prone personality, and that her early memories of Mary Sutton could be explained as those of a child fantasizing as a means to escape from reality. British writer Ian Wilson, a strong critic of claims of past life memories obtained through hypnotic regression, notes that 'an underlying substratum' of memories were validated and considers them genuine, but disputes that they indicate reincarnation; Wilson thinks it more likely that Cockell was possessed by Mary.

More detail about these and other criticisms of Cockell are to be found in the *Psi Encyclopedia* article on [the Mary Sutton case](#).

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Literature

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References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Cockell (1996), 8.
- 2.^ Cockell (2008), 36.
- 3.^ Cockell (2008), 37.
- 4.^ Cockell (2008), 38.
- 5.^ Cockell (2008), 226.

- 6.^ Cockell (2008), 30-31.
- 7.^ Cockell (1993, 1996, 2008, 2021) has described these memories in four books.
- 8.^ Cockell (1996), 104-37.
- 9.^ Cockell (1996), 46-47; (2008), 13.
- 10.^ Cockell (2008), 267-73.
- 11.^ Cockell (1996), 58-62; (2008), 273-82.
- 12.^ Cockell (1996), 104-37.
- 13.^ Cockell (1996), 105-6.
- 14.^ Cockell (1996), 106.
- 15.^ Cockell (1996), 67-68
- 16.^ Cockell (2021), 104-8.
- 17.^ Cockell (2021).
- 18.^ Cockell (2019).
- 19.^ Cockell (1996), 44-46; (2008), 127.
- 20.^ Cockell (2008), 125-224.
- 21.^ Cockell (2008), 267-73; (2017), 23-40.
- 22.^ Cockell (2008), 271.
- 23.^ Cockell (2017), 41-68.
- 24.^ Cockell (2021), 116-32.